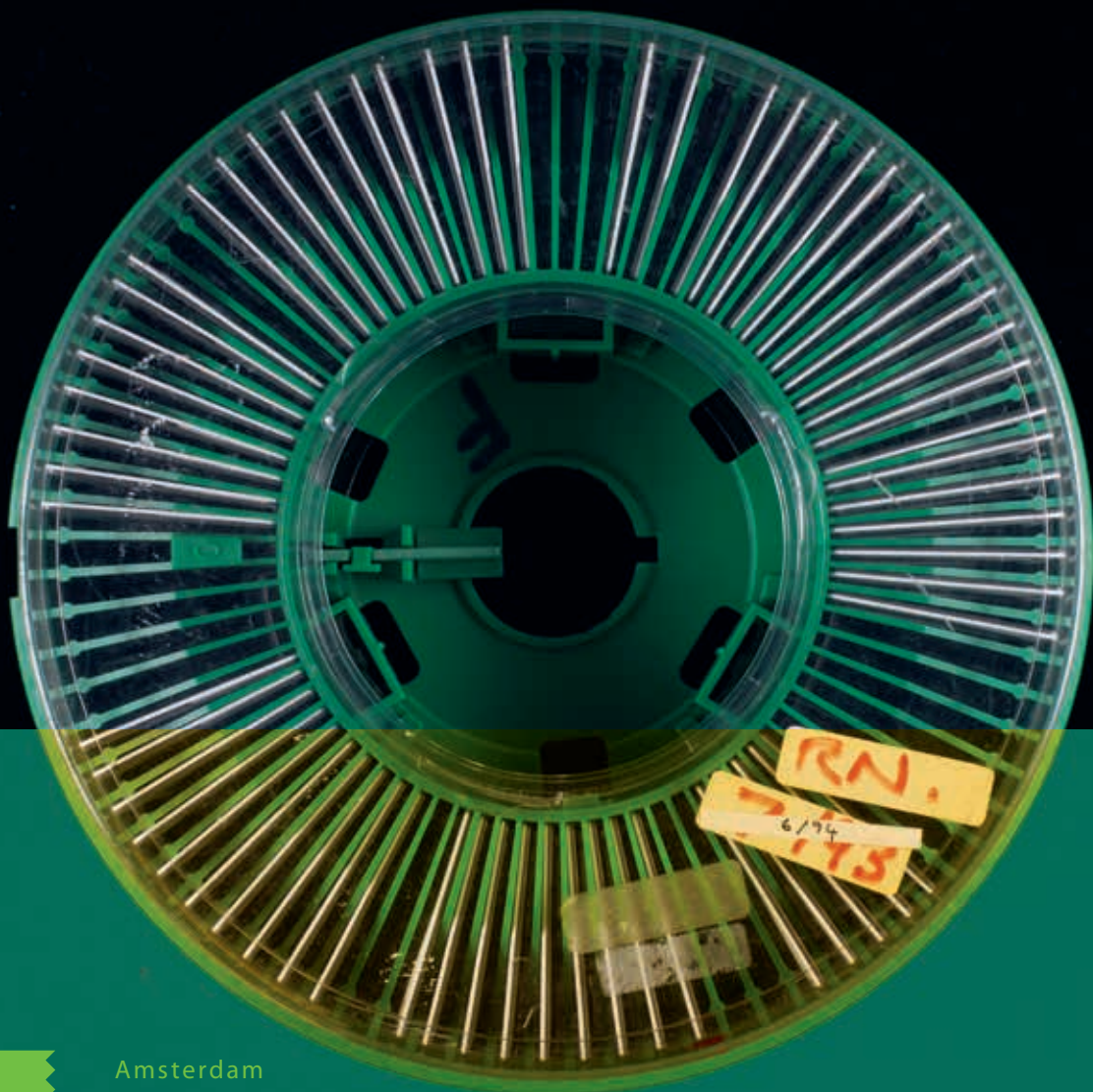


RECURSIONS

# Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration



Amsterdam  
University  
Press

JANE BIRKIN

## Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration

The book series RECURSIONS: THEORIES OF MEDIA, MATERIALITY, AND CULTURAL TECHNIQUES provides a platform for cuttingedge research in the field of media culture studies with a particular focus on the cultural impact of media technology and the materialities of communication. The series aims to be an internationally significant and exciting opening into emerging ideas in media theory ranging from media materialism and hardware-oriented studies to ecology, the post-human, the study of cultural techniques, and recent contributions to media archaeology. The series revolves around key themes:

- The material underpinning of media theory
- New advances in media archaeology and media philosophy
- Studies in cultural techniques

These themes resonate with some of the most interesting debates in international media studies, where non-representational thought, the technicity of knowledge formations and new materialities expressed through biological and technological developments are changing the vocabularies of cultural theory. The series is also interested in the mediatic conditions of such theoretical ideas and developing them as media theory.

#### **Editorial Board**

- Jussi Parikka (University of Southampton)
- Anna Tuschling (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)
- Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (University of British Columbia)

# Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration

*Jane Birkin*

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Author's own photograph

Cover design: Suzan Beijer

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 964 2

e-ISBN 978 90 4855 315 0 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789463729642

NUR 670

© J. Birkin / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2021

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

# Table of Contents

List of illustrations	7
Acknowledgements	9
Introduction	11
1 The archivization of the image	27
2 The social archive	61
3 Catalogue, list, description	93
4 The archiving camera	125
5 Archival art, performativity and poetics	155
6 Afterword: the post-digital archive	183
Bibliography	203
Index	213



# List of illustrations

Figure 1.1	August Sander, <i>Master Mason</i> (1932). © Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur—August Sander Archiv, Cologne / DACS 2019.	33
Figure 1.2	Alphonse Bertillon, albumen silver print from glass negative (1894). Recto showing photograph of Gaston Perot, verso identifying Perot as labourer and anarchist. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Gilman Collection).	35
Figure 1.3	Illustration and description of the louse from Robert Hooke, <i>Microscopic Observations or Dr Hooke's Wonderful Discoveries by the Microscope</i> (London, Printed for Robert Wilkinson, 1780). Courtesy of the Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Rare Books quarto QH 271.	44
Figure 1.4	Spirit photograph by William Hope featuring Harry Price as sitter and featuring the 'spirit' of Price's mother (c.1922). University of London, Senate House Library.	51
Figure 1.5	Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin Yekaterina Samutsevic, of Pussy Riot, from Broomberg and Chanarin's series of portraits <i>Spirit is a Bone</i> (2013). © Broomberg & Chanarin; Courtesy the artists and Lisson Gallery.	56
Figure 2.1	<i>Carte de Visite</i> by Oliver François Xavier Sarony (1860s), albumen silver print. Recto showing George Henry Broughton, verso showing the photographer's mark. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Albert Ten Eyck Gardner Collection).	63
Figure 2.2	Mountbatten Album, MB2-L7, page 62, 'Acrobatics!! Malta, Summer 1932'. Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.	66
Figure 2.3	As above, page 63 (these two pages together form a spread). Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.	67
Figure 2.4	Carousel of slides for the Kodak Carousel Projector. Author's own photograph.	75



Figure 2.5	Numbering system on the carousel. Author's own photograph.	78
Figure 3.1	Strongroom, Special Collections, University of Southampton. Courtesy of the Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.	95
Figure 3.2	Hetai Patel, installation view from <i>Love and Marriage</i> (2012). Courtesy Hetai Patel and John Hansard Gallery. Photo: Steve Shrimpton.	101
Figure 3.3	'Two Boys Boxing', From Carmen Kilner's Album, part of The Basque Children of '37 Archive. Courtesy of Carmen Kilner.	115
Figure 4.1	Jane Birkin. Still from film 0025, part of the screen-based installation <i>El Rastro</i> (2014). Author's own work.	141
Figure 4.2	Jane Birkin. Still from film 0030, as above. Author's own work.	141
Figure 4.3	Jane Birkin. Still from film 0037, as above. Author's own work.	142
Figure 4.4	Page from a copy book of the First Duke of Wellington, a memorandum dated 20 November 1806, MS 61 WP1/165. Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.	151
Figure 5.1	Ceiling ducting carrying filtered air and other services, Special Collections, University of Southampton. Courtesy of the Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.	161
Figure 5.2	Nine contact prints from the Hampshire Roads Survey, MS1/LF780/UNI 7/105/6. Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.	164
Figure 5.3	Jane Birkin (2012) Still from the film <i>Island</i> at 00:03:56. Author's own work.	171
Figure 5.4	Jane Birkin (2012) Still from the film <i>Island</i> at 00:04:08. Author's own work.	171
Figure 5.5	Jane Birkin (2012) Still from the film <i>Island</i> at 00:04:19. Author's own work.	172
Figure 6.1	Figure 6.1: Kenneth Goldsmith <i>Printing out the Internet</i> , Labor Gallery, Mexico City (2013). Courtesy of the artist and Labor Gallery.	189

# Acknowledgements

Although I produced this book as an independent scholar, I consider myself very lucky to work within the research community at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, and in the Special Collections at the same University. I would like to thank my colleagues for their kindness and positivity that has sustained me throughout. Special acknowledgements must go to Jussi Parikka and Sunil Manghani at Winchester School of Art, and it goes without saying—but in true archival fashion I want to record it here—that I am indebted to Anne-Marrie Steel and Karen Robson in Special Collections for their thoughtfulness and advice.

Outside of the University of Southampton, this book has benefitted from the incisive comments and questions from scholars at the various conferences and symposia that I have taken part in, and from the editors and anonymous peer reviewers of the journal articles that I have written. Many ideas that were first tested out in these places have been built upon here. A huge thank you must also go to Michelle Henning. She examined my PhD, and if it was not for her confidence in my ideas and my writing this book may not have materialized at all.

Finally, and most importantly, my truly heartfelt thanks go to my partner, Roy Naylor, and to our son, Tom Naylor, who have listened patiently, responded wisely, and supported me unconditionally throughout.



# Introduction

Some years ago—I think it was in 2005—I was browsing through one of the printed catalogues in the Archives at the University of Southampton where I had recently started to work, trying to trace a particular photograph for a researcher. I was unexpectedly struck by the words on the page in front of me, which included such phrases as: ‘a very large number of people (none of who is identified)’ and ‘brass band instruments (distant and indistinct)’. I was trying to find an image and these descriptions were there as finding aids, but the language used, simple and descriptive, yet guarded and non-committal—and with a particular emphasis on objects—has stayed with me. I copied the words down there and then, together with the manuscript numbers, thinking I would at some later point go and look for these photographs. At this time I was working as an artist with text and photographic images in a speculative and largely intuitive way, and I was extremely curious as to how these words related to the images they described. I imagined the photographs to be faded out wide shots, perhaps slightly soft and blurry, echoing the words on the page. In fact, I never did try to find these particular photographs and now I really do not want to see them. The words by themselves have become extremely significant to me, because they are so utterly representative of the affective nature of archival description. This affect does not only materialize through questions of how they might relate to—and afford imaginings of—the images they describe, but also in terms of the curious style of the administrative language itself. My own art practice is now firmly situated in the archive, and the questions and arguments put forward in this practice are explored through film, performance and print, always with language included. The linguistic element comes out of a conceptualization of the same institutional techniques of description that I was so taken by years ago. It is from this unusual position—as an artist, with an archive-related practice, also working in archives—that the breaking open of the language, systems and procedures of the institution is possible. It brings with it a consideration of what description does for the image, how it represents it and how it situates it within the archive system, and an appreciation of description in its own right, as a restricted and poetic writing form.

---

Birkin, J., *Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2021

DOI: 10.5117/9789463729642\_INTRO

Hence, the title of this book has a duality of meaning, emphasizing both administrative language *per se*—at first glance, somewhat grey and formal but with inherent and systemic poetic worth—and the language of administration in a more operative way, as it draws us deep in to the systems and techniques of institutional spaces and into the image itself. The cataloguing process transports photographic objects into managed text-based spaces where they can be examined and understood alongside other objects, photographic or otherwise. Whilst institutional image description—predominantly visual content-based and operating at the level of the single object—does not engage with the image in a way that we are familiar with, it certainly does engage, as does the whole process of bringing photographs into the archive. The language of administration infiltrates the language of the image.

The process of image description is not thought of as a conceptual activity within archives (although the transfer from image to text involves quite a conceptual leap in itself) but, in the manner of the readymade, it is conceptualized as it is taken outside of its intended space. Conceptual writers, including the language-based conceptual artists of the 1960s and 70s and today's conceptual writers and poets, are discussed in this book in relation to the archive in terms of their performative (instructional) methodologies, their restricted writing techniques, and their engagement with what can broadly be termed recordkeeping. Photographers—and artists working with photography—are discussed for the just same reasons, except that we would need to use the words 'restricted imaging' instead of 'restricted writing' to describe their practices. Thus, a connection between 'archival' text and 'archival' image is forged in terms of their common methodological roots, and this is at the core of many arguments around the equivalence of the photograph and its description that are set out here.

In his correspondence with fellow artist Ruth McLennan,<sup>1</sup> Uriel Orlow argues that when one is not involved in specific archival research, it is possible to focus on the procedural aspects of archives, 'the sheer materiality of the collections, beyond the specific information its documents contain'.

1 From October 2001 to July 2002, McLennan herself worked as artist in residence in the Archives of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics; this was the first time that an artist had been a resident in a UK academic archive. McLennan was treated as a member of the staff and enjoyed unlimited access to all archives. See a report on her residency, Tate Papers no.9: 'Art in the Archives: An Artist's Residency in the Archives of the London School of Economics' by LSE archivist Sue Donnelly. Available online at <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/09/art-in-the-archives-an-artists-residency-in-the-archives-of-the-london-school-of-economics>

He goes on to ask how we can comprehend ‘the meaning and status of the archive as a whole, operating as it does like a memorial behind closed doors’. (p. 79) I aim to communicate the meaning of the archive through its operations, which I have observed on a day-to-day basis. At the same time, I want to reveal archive objects as more than memorials, as objects that remain with us in our contemporary milieu, ready and waiting to be put to use. My own practice—although it has informed large parts of this book and continues to prompt my writing—is only revealed here on a few occasions. In Chapter 4 there is a short extract from my 1300-word set-piece description *Patrons-watch-an-activist-004.jpg*, included in order to show how description connects us to the moment of capture. In the same chapter there are stills from my image-text films, series title *El Rastro*, which help interrogate the notion of the still image inside the film. In Chapter 5, I have provided more stills, this time from the film *Island*, entirely text-based and forming part of a discussion on the significance and the reading of grey literature, prompted by a passage from Fuller and Goffey’s *Evil Media* (2012).

The experience of working behind the scenes in a large university archive has not only brought an understanding of the importance of the catalogue and the hidden objects and storage systems that it parallels and describes, it has also led me to recognize the vast amount of hidden labour that is involved in the keeping of archives. I am constantly struck by how something so physically static as an archive has so much human activity based around it. The researcher only sees the tip of the iceberg in terms of the space and the objects, and the many different people involved in maintaining both. With all this in mind, this book emphasizes the material aspects of the archive: the physical space made up of shelves, boxes and files, and the situating of the single object within this controlled space, together with the systematic, performative, human practices of cataloguing and description that record and uphold both. The labour of the archive, or the office, factory, shop, building site—or any other workplace for that matter—is often perceived as quite distinct from work that is designated as art. Yet we might get a sense that the work that is carried out in the archive, for example, is not all that different to that carried out by the artists, writers and photographers encountered in this book, in terms of predetermined structures and controlled methodologies that function in combination with human industry. We see artists and poets transcribing, copying, recordkeeping, alphabetizing, cataloguing, and following instruction. Thus, the lines between workplace labour and artistic labour become less distinct.

Inevitably, economics come into play here: description inside the archive institution is a costly and labour-intensive affair and object-level description

itself is a form of labour that is fast becoming too time consuming for some institutions to employ. A description of the length and detail of my *Patrons* description (mentioned above) could certainly never be carried out inside the archive, but art production is expected to be time intensive and it frequently comes up for criticism when it is not. Yet artists and writers experience the same difficulties that we see in the workplace with regard to time and money—they work in the real world after all and almost all artists carry out paid labour in order to support their practice, performing a delicate balancing act between the two kinds of labour. In my case—and I am very lucky in this respect—it is perhaps less of a balancing act, as I view my paid work as practice-based research.

Since I came across those image descriptions in 2005, and probably for a good ten years before that, the archive has been the focus of much academic study and art practice and has at the same time garnered broad public interest, particularly with reference to photographic material in each case. This could be in order to explore the visual histories of places, people and cultures; to give new value to old images through remix or re-contextualization; or for the increasingly popular activity of researching family history. This book does not attempt to further any ethnographic, cultural or historical discourse through archive photographs; indeed, there is not a great deal of debate around individual photographic objects at all, let alone what they might mean within a particular social or historical narrative. Instead of the ‘what’ they might mean, I focus here on ‘how’ they might mean; in particular, how the archive catalogue, with its hierarchical system of ordered and juxtaposed descriptions that mirror the physical storage systems, might advance the understanding of the archive and the photographs within it. The catalogue is presented not as a simple finding aid, but as a compact tool for deep thinking around single images, image sets and the temporalities inherent to both. The cataloguing, listing and enumeration of images, although produced to certain predetermined standards and using restricted and therefore distinctive language, is considered and valued as a form of knowledge production in its own right. I identify image description as an enduring technique that is best carried out directly by humans, rather than through the filter of a metadata schema or other computer algorithm.

Although I have enjoyed ‘behind the scenes’ visits to many archives in the course of my research and gained valuable insights as to the ways that they function on a physical level, with variations in space and scale producing operational differences, I inevitably and unapologetically draw on my experience of the large university archive where I work, which I have found to be a model of institutional archival practice. I make reference

to one photographic collection at Southampton in particular, that of the Mountbatten family, and the fragments of description that I mention at the beginning of this introduction refer to photographs from that collection. There are some 50,000 photographs in the Mountbatten Archive, with many of these described in detail. Examples of descriptions are used to support particular arguments, but at the same time they serve to acquaint the reader with what might be an unfamiliar form. All the descriptions from the Mountbatten Archive that are reproduced here are copyright of the University of Southampton.<sup>2</sup>

Another photographic collection from which I provide catalogue entries is the Harry Price Collection at the Senate House Library, University of London. Price was an amateur but well connected 'psychic detective' who specialized in investigating spiritualism and other psychical phenomena. He toggled alliances between populist organizations, such as the Magic Circle, and the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, which he formed in 1925, and which was to morph into the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation in 1934. Although this organization took the University's name, there were no official ties; the academic connection was constructed in order to add authority to Price's somewhat eccentric endeavours. But Price's investigations were rigorous in terms of organization and photographic documentation. They often took the form of self-contained, theatrical events, such as experiments with fire walking, with being buried alive, and with blindfolded reading, to give some examples. He also conducted controlled investigations into the fraudulent practices of well-known psychics in his 'laboratory'. Together with related material, the Harry Price Collection represents the archetypal personal archive, comprising many different media forms and with clear and traceable connections between the different parts. Likewise, the Mountbatten photographs are just one part of an extensive body of organized and well-catalogued records.

The efficacy of description as an enabler of theoretical and practical understanding of images is extended into a conversation around other places where image and language meet, from oral practices of talking around family photographs through to personal and social tagging (involving both paid and unpaid labour) and institutional metadata systems that are systematically applied to networked archive images. Many different types of image sets,

2 More information on the Mountbatten Archives, including instructions on how to request access to the database, can be found on the University of Southampton Archives' Special Collection webpages at <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/archives/cataloguedatabases/mb/index>. page [Accessed 8 November 2019]



or 'archives', are considered in this book—public and private, formal and informal, physical and digital—but these are ultimately measured and tested against the rule-based ordering systems and performative cataloguing practices that are found within a traditional archive setting.

Recordkeeping and the power it affords is considered from the perspective of the cataloguing and description of materials in a direct and future-proof way—and of course through the work of the conservator, which is briefly touched on but is worthy of much more detailed scrutiny than I have room for here. All these activities make things available to researchers, and in their original context. The responsibility to keep archives open and accessible is a consideration here as much as it is in any discussion on recordkeeping, in government and anywhere that data is kept. In our networked world this is of great concern, as we cannot always trace, access or even *know* the scope of what is recorded. The visibility of archive material is dependent on available and workable technologies; in *Archive Fever*, Derrida asks, 'in what way has the whole of this field [of psychoanalysis] been determined by a state of the technology of communication and of archivization?' (1998, p. 16) And as Marlene Manoff argues, with reference to Derrida, 'If the archive cannot or does not accommodate a particular kind of information or mode of scholarship, then it is effectively excluded from the historical record.' She adds, and this is a critical consideration throughout this book, 'Electronic archives have very different implications for the historical record than do paper archives.' (p. 12) Wolfgang Ernst's writing is key to the understanding of the complexity—both the positives and the negatives—of the archive's transition into the digital milieu. To give an example—one that also relates to issues of archival visibility—in his essay 'Archive in Transition', Ernst reflects on the conflicts between the infinite possibilities of the machine-based search and the closed nature of standardization (2002, p. 479). Ernst's media-archaeological viewpoint is most valuable, combined as it is with a comprehensive understanding of the structures of the physical archive.

Some gaps in archives come down to obvious and sinister cover-ups by governments and corporations and many of these are well documented. Perhaps the most well-known is the attempt to destroy the records of GDR's intelligence agency (the Stasi), just before the reunification of Germany. Other cases will undoubtedly continue to be brought to light, although they may become increasingly difficult to uncover in the digital age. However, in *The Silence of the Archive*, Simon Fowler argues that 'the difficulty of using online finding aids is perhaps the greatest silence that users now meet'. He cites poor interface design, the use of archival jargon, and the absence of any clear description of how the records are arranged, as factors that make it

difficult not only for users to find material, but to be sure that it even exists. These factors are exacerbated by the fact that the user is normally working remotely, with no archivist on hand to help. This, Fowler argues, impacts most on 'the elderly, the less educated and those from ethnic minorities'. (p. 59) And Ernst argues that distributed digital archives bring with them a new kind of archival secrecy, even if the old institutional archive is 'deprived of its traditional power' when it becomes accessible online (2016, pp. 14-15). There are also many practical reasons why documents cannot be made available: some are suppressed by data protection regulations because they are connected with people who are still living; and there objects that may be deemed 'unfit for production' due to their degraded physical state.

All this has to be taken into account when trying to make sense of archives. Manoff describes how postcolonial scholars, for example, have needed to adopt strategies of reinterpretation of information in order to 'call into question the colonial version of events' (p. 16). In other words, they turn the focus on the subjects of colonialism instead of the administrators and examine the gaps in the records as much as the records themselves. Likewise, Allan Sekula in his essay 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital' concludes: 'The archive has to be read from below, from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed, silenced or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress.' (2003, p. 451) The disordered and incomplete nature of archives, their position in our contemporary milieu, and the possibilities for their reconfiguration are always already present, and these aspects are emphasized in this book. It must at the same time be noted that researchers have their own agendas and may use archives to strengthen existing power structures.

The ordered and material view of the archive that I offer in this book differs to that revealed by Derrida in *Archive Fever*, where 'Archive' is perceived as 'only a *notion*' (1998, p. 25 [original italics]) and becomes a metaphor for complex dialogue on past and future, on memory and death, through Freud's theories of psychoanalysis. In an interview with Geert Lovink, Ernst cites his research year at the German Historical Institute in Rome as the first time that he recognized the materiality of 'real archives'. This was to be a factor in Ernst connecting his own past involvement with French poststructuralism with his theoretical interest in archives. He remarks:

I then discovered that no place can be more deconstructive than archives themselves, with their relational but not coherent topology of documents that wait to be reconfigured, again and again. The archival subject is thus a way out of the postmodern aesthetics of arbitrary anything goes—without

having to return to authoritarian hermeneutics [...] The simple fact is that archives exist not only in metaphorical ways, as described by Foucault and Derrida, but as part of a very real, very material network of power over memory. (2013, p. 194)

It must be noted, however, that in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault correctly defines the archive—without metaphor—as ‘that which determines that all these things do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity’ (2002, p. 145).

Foucault’s comments on archival accumulation are tied to the notion of original order, the preservation of the order of material as it enters the archive, whether from an individual, company or organization. This is a developmental or diachronic order, often confusingly non-chronological and with no apparent narrative. Time and complex temporal anomalies are therefore part and parcel of the archive and are fundamental to its reading and its understanding; Guilian Bruno (n.p.) calls for a working through of ‘the dynamics and tensions expressed by the aggregates of disparate mnemonic materials’. The diachronic nature of the archive, the building up of objects over time, is apposite to Foucault’s ideas on the research model of archaeology. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he argues that objects may sometimes be ‘temporally neutral’ and may at other times imply a ‘particular temporal direction’. He explains how archaeology ‘tries to show the intersection between necessarily successive relations and others that are not so. [...] Far from being indifferent to succession, archaeology maps the *temporal vectors of deviation*.’ (2002, p. 186 [original italics]) It is the temporal mapping of discrete yet interconnected relations that the archive catalogue does so effectively, as it presents a clear, hierarchical, list-based consolidation of particular units of description.

Although the book starts with historical encounters with image archivization and ends with a discussion of the post-digital archive, this is not a strictly chronological journey. The temporal structure of the book mirrors the temporality of the archive itself, as different time zones are dipped in and out of in a media-archaeological manner. There is consideration throughout of traditional archival systems and technologies and how they might connect with, or have influence on, today’s models of the digital archive and the image within it. Media archaeology offers an understanding of digital cultures through physical examination and critique of past media forms and therefore has clear connections to this study of the archive, which is overtly material in its base but extendable to less material concepts and values. In their article ‘Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology

into an Art Method', Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka argue that archives, just like consumer electronics in this respect, present themselves as boxes waiting to be 'cracked open, bent and modified' (p. 429). This idea is critical to the understanding of the wider sense of the archive as seen through a media archaeological lens—opening up, digging out, and repurposing are embedded in media-archaeological methodologies, as well as in archival research methods. It is also central to the view—which runs all through this book—that although an archive may be static, boxed and compartmentalized, its stasis safeguarded by institutional cataloguing and storage methods, it is an overtly dynamic system.

The word 'archive' is itself now incorporated into our digital vocabulary and the structure of the archive has firm ties to the organization of digital media of all kinds. In addition to the word 'archive' itself, various linguistic terms—such as 'file' and 'document'—have migrated in a very metaphorical way from the workings of the physical archive to that of the network, echoing media-archaeological thought and in turn being analysed by it. Cornelia Vismann emphasizes the reality of these ties, as she explains how 'files and their techniques organize the very architecture of digital machines' (p. 164). Conversely, as Bruno (n.p.) points out, the apparent immateriality of networks has provoked a deep fascination for the materiality of the archive, and this has become a media-archaeological focus in its own right. In terms of a material and media theoretical view of documents and the practices of documentation, Lisa Gitelman's *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of the Document* (2014), and Cornelia Vismann's *Files: Law and Media Technology* (2008), are books that enable an understanding of the archive and its techno-administrative reach, through their respective studies of the status of the document and the mechanics of the file; and in both cases with an emphasis on the materiality of the objects.

In his book *What is Media Archaeology*, Jussi Parikka argues it to be key that media archaeology thinks through its ties with archival institutions, just as philosophy and cultural theory have done in the past, and he recognizes the importance of the archive to the study of media itself (2012, pp. 5-6). He positions the archive as a storage space that gives rise to a media-archaeological examination that follows on from 'Foucault's expansion of the concept from the concrete physical places of storage of cultural data to the discourses that govern modes of thinking, acting, and expression' (ibid., p. 113). Parikka also perceives the storage and preservation of cultural heritage as 'an index to understand time, to rethink time, that is at the core of the wider media-archaeological process' (2013, p. 12).

The embedded time of the photograph and the temporality of the image set are approached in this study through an analysis of archival practices of ordering, cataloguing and describing, with hierarchies of description—from *fonds*,<sup>3</sup> to series, to file, to single item—indicating the progress from general to specific time. Furthermore, the photograph is positioned as paralleling the static nature of the archive environment as a whole: the camera freezes and indexes time in a way that parallels archival notions of stasis, and the photograph itself represents the preservation of discrete yet interconnected units of information for future use. It is a material reality that, like the archive itself, preserves the past, is ever situated in the present, and is there for the future. At the same time, and exactly because of the operational and time-critical qualities inherent in the dry language of archival administration, the poetic nature of the ‘writing’ of the image prevails, and this aspect of description sits entirely outside of time.

## Chapter structure

The first chapter of this book takes a historical view of the archivization of the image, always with one eye on technology, as Derrida’s use of the term suggests (1998, p. 16). Positioned as precursors to early photographic documentation, seventeenth-century publications in the natural sciences are explored for their differing descriptive styles as well as their images. There follows an examination of the classificatory powers of the camera and the ways in which the image has been incorporated into the archival system, from early scientific imaging, through to the work of photographers such as Alphonse Bertillon and August Sander, via Sekula’s seminal essay on the photograph as a tool of archival administration, ‘The Body and the Archive’ (1986). There is detailed discussion in this chapter on the position of August Sander’s *People of the Twentieth Century*, a project begun in 1892 and running through to the mid-twentieth century, with an enquiry as to whether it should be classed as a scientific venture, or if the science (physiognomy in this case) is used to validate the art. Alphonse Bertillon’s work for the Paris Police Archive in the late 1800s is clearer in its intent, with physiognomy at the forefront of his bleak photographic work and

3 *Afonds* is an archive group that sits at the top of the description hierarchy. All the material in a *fonds* comes from the same organization or individual, and the order in which the organization or individual has kept it is preserved in the archive. The term *respect des fonds* denotes the maintenance of original order,

written documentation. The chapter ends with an analysis of the work of contemporary artist-photographers who uphold these classificatory practices, and who in some way refer back to early works of classification. For example, Sander's opus is echoed and referenced in Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's 2013 project *Spirit is a Bone*, as are issues of state surveillance that link back to Bertillon. A constant theme in this chapter is the rub between photography as art and its authority as document, from early attempts to position portrait photography as a fine art, to the present day where *the* document and *to* document are accepted parts of fine art practice.

Chapter 2 examines the concept of 'archive' in the social sphere. Popular photography and the language that accompanies it are scrutinized here firstly through an examination of the family album, whose viewing requires an unscripted narration that is liable to change with each presentation. Next, the slideshow—it too requires a voice-over—is examined as a mechanical technology that bridges the gap between album and home movie, and the slide carousel itself is framed as a device for archiving. Whereas the photograph album, like the home movie, has a beginning and an end that are fixed, the slideshow is a more nebulous form: the order of slides, and therefore the stories they tell, are subject to change when necessary. Vilém Flusser fears the effects of the commercialization of photography, the de-skilling and the condition that he calls 'photo-mania', all of which he connects to the new availability and the automation of the snapshot camera (2000 [1983], pp. 57-58). Flusser's anxieties around the addiction to photography are taken forward to the social media milieu: an age of unprecedented access to the making and the receiving of photographs; an age where Parikka argues that 'we are miniarchivists ourselves' (2013, p. 2), as we organize and store our own material. In a social media context, the language around photographs takes the form of comment and tag. The motivations for tagging and the consequences for the image are examined in the final part of this chapter.

The third chapter takes us inside the archive and deals with the management of objects through institutional cataloguing systems. The notion of original order is scrutinized; its roots and its inherent discontinuities, and particularly the implications for photographic sets. Michel Foucault calls for discontinuity to become 'both an instrument and an object of research' (2002, p. 10) and discontinuity is reflected upon within a discussion of enumeration and of non-narrative forms: the catalogue list is considered as a highly visual form that allows relationships between objects to be understood and plots to build. The catalogue presents archive collections—their scope and their significance—in a succinct and graspable way, and I therefore

term it 'a machine for thinking' (after Vestberg, 2013). The description of the single image is also considered in terms of Erwin Panofsky's text on iconography, where it is firmly placed at a pre-iconographic level, as a very literal rendition of the visual content of the image, using language that must be understood within our shared systems of knowledge (pp. 3-17). This leads us to the *reading* of the image: archive image description is a form of recordkeeping, it is dry yet participatory, written for a specific audience but with no specific future use in mind. Lastly, there is a critique of the use of metadata schema in archives, which is framed here as a time-saving strategy that does well in terms of networking and interoperability, yet is relatively poor in terms of accuracy of description, and therefore in its primary role as a finding aid.

In Chapter 4, and following on from ideas posited in the first chapter, I argue the camera's persistence and growth as a tool for archivization; how camera technology continues to facilitate investigation, for example, in terms of surveillance techniques. Underpinning this, the chapter focuses on the idea of photographic registration, the discrete image time that is determined and recorded by the shutter of the apparatus involved. This moment (and the exact duration of the moment varies) is subsequently preserved in the archive catalogue directly and clearly through the language of visual content-based image description. Photography is thus presented as a form of spatial and temporal recordkeeping and Laura Mulvey's concept of 'inscription' and her analysis of the source of the still image's place in time within a film (pp. 116-117) is examined alongside D.P Fowler's notion of 'narrative pause' in description (p. 25). Building on the notion of the pause in the narrative, a set of descriptions of a series of images, a catalogue list from the Harry Price Archive, is examined through a filmic gaze, as the disorder of original order presents textual flashbacks, jump cuts and close shots. There is a discussion of the developmental temporalities and non-narrative juxtapositions in Chris Marker's 1962 film *La Jetée*, and comparisons are drawn to the Harry Price list. Liam Cole Young posits the list itself as 'a paradigmatic form of non-narrative inscription'. (2014, n.p.) This designation fits completely with regard to the Price example. Image time is further considered through notions of 'tense' and 'aspect' in both single images and image sequences such as this, and through the lens of descriptive practices. Finally, the importance of the camera as it is used inside the archive is considered. The temporal status of the archive copy is examined, with digitization of photographic images framed as a second moment of registration, as a form of documentation, and as having major implications for the status and even the survival of the original object.

Chapter 5 considers some of the ideas behind archive-related art. The aesthetics of degradation is posited as a way in which artists and photographers have visualized time, memory and loss, in a broadly anthropological way, through archival media. Yet, it is argued, archival degradation is a something of a popular myth, and is tied up with the routine use of photo filters and apps that now permeate social media. Dust is largely ‘the stuff of fairy tales’ (Parikka, 2015, p. 85), as state-of-the-art environmental management systems and conservation techniques keep dust and decay at bay in today’s archive. The chapter turns its focus from the largely anthropological and nostalgic notions of the degraded image to the system-driven performative practices that are shared by archivists and art practitioners alike. Performativity is defined here by Margaret Iversen in her 2010 essay ‘Auto-maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography’, where she frames it as a ‘putting into play repetition and the inherently iterative character of the instruction’. (p. 15) This definition has clear confluence with archival practices, which are, as detailed in Chapter 3, carried out to predetermined standards and therefore result in the human-system hybridity that Iversen argues is crucial to performative photography. The discussion includes not only photographers, but extends to artists who work purely with text, including conceptual writers and poets. Archival description is identified a type of ‘grey literature’; as a poetic and rhythmic form; and as part of the wider poetics of administration. There is a plea to raise the status of the much-maligned description, giving it true freedom and autonomy (D. P. Fowler, pp. 26-27). The poetic nature of description is indeed intensified when it is freed from the archive and brought into the wider world, where it becomes a radical form of writing.

Chapter 6 is a final and somewhat shorter chapter than the rest, and it also acts as an afterword. It revisits certain themes and arguments, but from the distinct viewpoint of our position in what is known as the post-digital milieu; we are now in a place where we can offer some critique on the digital, at least in part through an examination of physical systems of storage, preservation, search and retrieval. Many issues that have long been prioritized in archival circles: preservation, security, privacy and context, for example, are now also at the forefront of network discourse and are deliberated in this final chapter. Borrowing a metaphor from screen-based technologies—and also from Alessandro Ludovico (p. 7) and Jaques Derrida (2005, pp. 62-63) in relation to the book as object—the chapter frames the archive as an enduring ‘interface’ that has stood the test of time. Conversely, the metaphorical uses of archival and administrative terms in discussions of the network are commonplace, including the word ‘archive’ itself, and various metaphors are questioned as to their viability; the term ‘memory’ is given special attention.



The chapter presents the physical archive—with its catalogue running in parallel—as a stable and static back-up for the digital, and not the other way around as is widely perceived in arguments around the digitization of archives. The enduring efficacy of object-level description is emphasized, even in the digital milieu, as an effective and practical tool for unlocking archives, for making them visible, as well as existing independently as an idiosyncratic and poetic way of writing the image.

## Works cited

- Bruno, G. (2016). Storage Space. *e-flux Architecture*. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/68650/storage-space/> [accessed 3 August 2018]
- Derrida, J. (1998). *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (2005). *Paper Machine*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Ernst, W. (2002). Archive in Transition. In B. Von Bismark, H.-P. Feldmann, H.U. Obrist, D. Stoller & U. Wuggenig (Eds.), *Interarchive* (pp. 475-484). Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung,
- Ernst, W. (2013). *Digital Memory and the Archive*. Edited and with an introduction by J. Parikka. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Ernst, W. (2016). Radically De-historicising the Archive. Decolonising Archival Memory from the Supremacy of Historical Discourse. In *Decolonising Archives* (pp. 9-16). L'Internationale Online.
- Flusser, V. (2000). *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Fowler, D.P. (1991). Narrate and Describe: the Problem of Ekphrasis. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 81, 25-35.
- Fowler, S. (2017). Inappropriate Expectations. In D. Thomas, S. Fowler & V. Johnson. *The Silence of the Archive* (pp. 41-63). London: Facet Publishing.
- Fuller, M. & Goffey, A. (2012). *Evil Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gitelman, L. (2014). *Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hertz, G. & Parikka, J. (2012). Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method. *Leonardo*, vol. 45, no. 5, 424-430.
- Iversen, M. (2010). Auto-Maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography. In D. Costello M. E. Iversen (Eds.), *Photography after Conceptual Art* (pp. 12-27). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ludovico, A. (2012). *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894*. Eindhoven: Onomatopée.

- Manoff, M. (2004). Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines. *Libraries and the Academy*, 41, 9-25.
- Mulvey, L. (2003). The 'Pensive Spectator' Revisited: Time and its Passing in the Still and Moving Image. In D. Green (Ed.), *Where is the Photograph?* (pp. 113-122). Maidstone and Brighton: Photoforum and Photoworks.
- Orlow, U. & McLennan, R. (2004). *Re: The Archive, the Image, and the Very Dead Sheep*. London: School of Advanced Study/The National Archives/Double Agents.
- Panofsky, E. (1962). *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Parikka, J. (2012). *What is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Parikka, J. (2013). Archival Media Theory: an Introduction to Wolfgang Ernst's Media Archaeology. In W. Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (pp. 1-22). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Parikka, J. (2015). *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sekula, A. (1986). The Body and the Archive. *October*, 39, 3-64.
- Sekula, A. (2003). Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital. In L. Wells (Ed.), *The Photography Reader* (pp. 443-452). London: Routledge.
- Vestberg, N.L. (2013). Ordering, Searching, Finding. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 12, 472-489.
- Vismann, C. (2008). *Files: Law, Media and Technology*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Young, L.C. (2014). On Lists and Networks: an Archaeology of Form. *Amodern 2* [Online]. Available at: <http://amodern.net/article/on-lists-and-networks/> [Accessed 19 July 2018]



# 1 The archivization of the image

## Abstract

The first chapter takes a historical view of the archivization of the image, with a view of the image as not only recording scientific exploration, for example, but also facilitating it. Seventeenth-century publications in the natural sciences are positioned as precursors to photographic documentation, and they also show differing descriptive styles. A debate on the status of the photographic image as art or document centres around August Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century*, a project that ran from the late-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The chapter ends with examples of the work of today's artist-photographers whose work in some way refer back to early works of classification, whilst at the same time examining contemporary issues such as surveillance culture.

**Keywords:** archivization; caption; classification; document; science; typology

In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida uses the term 'archivization' in relation to the technical production and keeping of records of psychoanalysis, specifically the way in which, if technologies such as portable tape recorders, computers, printers and 'above all E-mail' had been available for Freud and his contemporaries, our understanding of the field of psychoanalysis would be very different. Derrida calls this speculation 'retrospective science fiction' (1998, pp. 15-16). The process of archivization of the *image* needs to be understood through the photographic technologies that have been used to record and organize visual information from the beginning, and through the aspects of seriality that these technologies play out. This is apparent in the context of early classificatory applications of photography and statistics such as the Paris Police Archive photographs of 'criminal types' by Alphonse Bertillon. Allan Sekula, in his essay 'The Body and the Archive', regards the work of Bertillon and his associate Francis Galton as 'a merger of optics and statistics' (1986, p. 17) and the realization of the camera as a statistical

---

Birkin, J., *Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2021

DOI: 10.5117/9789463729642\_CH01

tool—the precise nature of photographic capture and its incorporation into both natural and social sciences—is critical in terms of photography's break with fine art in the late nineteenth century. The break is furthered by the publication of captioned photographs in magazines in the early twentieth century: the amalgamation of photograph and text pushes photography into a new documentary field, available to a wider public.

The typological applications of photography such as those presented to us by Bertillon and Galton and August Sander, for example in his project *People of the Twentieth Century*, which he began in 1892 and worked on into the mid-twentieth century, is intricately linked to the organizational practices that lie at the core of the archive project: the technology of the still camera captures a discrete moment in time and positions the subsequent material embodiment of this moment (the photograph) in the context of other related, yet discrete, material objects. Thus, the photograph acts as a metaphor for the archive institution as a whole, as it parallels archival ideals of stasis, preservation, storage of information for future use, and of the processes of contextualization through part-to-whole relationships.<sup>1</sup> Whilst both the physical and metaphorical links between image and archive will be expanded upon later, this chapter presents a discussion on—and a selective historical overview of—the ways in which the classificatory powers of the photographic image predicate its position as 'document' and thereby its archivization. Complex questions around art and document arise that are critical in relation to the position of the photograph in the archive setting. The chapter ends with a discussion of contemporary art and photographic projects that hark back to earlier photographic practices, but where the idea of the document is a critical concept, embedded and no longer contested.

## Text, image and the power to fix

Fixing is a word commonly associated with the photographic image: this image—indexical, evidential—fixes a fleeting moment in time and space. Alternatively, fixing is tied up with the technologies of photography, with the chemical processes of developing film and printing images. August

1 For a clarification of hierarchical and part-to-whole relationships in the archive, and archival description standards generally, see the International Council on Archives' document *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. Available for download at <https://www.ica.org/en/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition>. [Accessed 10 February 2018]

Sander, in his 1931 radio talk 'Photography as a Universal Language' presents us with a different kind of fixing again: 'Today with photography we can communicate our thoughts, conceptions, and realities, to all the people on earth; if we add the date of the year we have the power to fix the history of the world' (quoted in Sekula, 1984, pp. 83-84).<sup>2</sup> Although Sander is on one side declaring the authority of the photograph as a self-contained means of communication, universal exactly because of its independence from language, he acknowledges the historical and political consequences of attaching even a small amount of text to an image.

The captioned photographs that began to appear in magazines from around 1900 supported the kind of work being done by photographers such as Sander (1876-1964), and Eugene Atget (1857-1927). Walter Benjamin describes the impact of Atget's now well-known photographs of deserted Paris streets, comparing them to those of a crime scene:

The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way. At the same time picture magazines begin to put up signposts for him, right ones or wrong ones, no matter. (1999 [1935], p. 220).

The signposts Benjamin refers to here are the captions attached to the photographs in the magazines where they were published, producing a mix of text and image that he considered to be thought provoking and challenging, moving the photograph away from previous methods of art appreciation that were largely based around the value of the contemplative and self-reflective act, and taking it towards real-world ideas and concepts that might lie outside of the image itself.

Even without the captions, the affect of Atget's photographs of deserted streets was quite different to that afforded by the early photographic portrait, which Benjamin argues was embroiled in a melancholic cult of remembrance that revolved around 'the fleeting expression of a human face', the last vestige of the 'aura': the unique existence and particular relationship to time and space that is embodied in a work of art; a particular presence that does not normally endure in mechanical reproductions (ibid., p. 214).

2 The essay 'The Traffic in Photographs', reproduced in Sekula's book *Photography Against the Grain*, was first published in *Art Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Spring 1981.

Benjamin recognizes the emergence of photographs such as those by Atget as representing the point at which the technical image finally managed to sever its attachment to the aura, as its documentary and evidential characteristics circumvent links with past art forms. He understands the immense difficulty that photography—and then film—causes for traditional aesthetics, as it represents a shift in function, citing a ‘fetishistic, fundamentally anti-technical notion of *Art* with which theorists of photography have tussled with for almost a century without, of course, achieving the slightest result’. (1972 [1931], p. 6 [original italics])

In his book *Image, Music, Text*, Roland Barthes identifies the addition of text to an image as pervasive: ‘Today, at the level of mass communications, it appears that the linguistic message is indeed present in every image: as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strip.’ He takes a negative view of the press caption, describing it as ‘a parasitic message’ that ‘loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination’. (1977, p. 25-27) Barthes sees all images as polysemous, as having multiple meanings, and he cites the linguistic message as a method that society has developed ‘to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds’ in an image (ibid., p. 38-39 [original italics]). Yet he questions whether polysemy is a dysfunction that needs to be fixed at all. He also argues that the closer the text is placed to the image, the less the connotative effect (ibid., p. 26). This idea is of course pertinent to the photo caption, which is tightly bound to the image, but not to archival description, where images and texts are kept apart.

In relation to the idea of physical distance between text and image, a question that surfaces frequently in this book is one of whether a text can stand in for an image, which is exactly what archival description needs to do. Although Barthes disputes that it ever can (ibid., pp. 25-27), he acknowledges that adding *descriptive* text can help to identify an image, to fix its multiple meanings: ‘the text replies—in a more or less direct, more or less partial manner—to the question: *what is it?*’ (ibid., p. 39 [original italics]) Inside the archive, cataloguers writing descriptions of images must answer this question as clearly and as literally as possible, and yet they must leave meanings unfixed, open to a kind of speculation that affords further research; to this end, a standardized approach to writing is adopted that does not dismiss the polysemous nature of the image.

Exactly how archivists approach this difficult and delicate task will be expanded upon in later chapters. But, put briefly, a requirement of archival description of an image is that it should be an accurate and neutral rendering of the visual content of the image as is possible. Descriptions are often as short as newspaper captions—and this is in most part due to the time

limitations imposed on cataloguers—but they are quite different in their aims. Whereas newspaper captions are often written in order to shepherd us into chosen narratives that lie outside of the image, archive images are neutrally described, unaffected by any preconceptions of how or why they might be used in the future, leaving all options open. As Sekula argues in his essay ‘Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital’, an archive is ‘a “clearing house” of meaning’, where ‘the possibility of meaning is liberated from the actual contingencies of use’. (2003, pp. 444-445) A discrete description of pure visual content, however detailed, does not provide much of an indication of context, plot or historical meaning; mirroring the photograph itself, it fixes a transitory moment in time and space. Archive photographs are indeed objects of evidence and information, but they are given meaning—historical, cultural, political—by different researchers and at different times and in the context of related materials. The catalogue description, with its unique reference number, refers to a specific location in the archive, and, unlike the caption, acts as a ‘signpost’ (Benjamin, 1999 [1935], 220) only to the image itself—literally, in terms of location, but also in terms of content.

### Photography as bibliographic tool

August Sander was a key player in the bibliographic, organizational aspect of photography that is central to Sekula’s argument in the ‘The Body and the Archive’, an essay that positions the photographic image at the centre of archival organization, knowledge production and social administration. Sekula argues:

Photography was to be both an object and means of bibliographic rationalization [...] Just as photographs were to be incorporated into the realm of the text, so also the text could be incorporated into the realm of the photograph. If photography retained its prestige as a universal language, it increasingly did so in conjunction with a textual paradigm that was housed within the library. (1986, p. 57).

Sander is only briefly mentioned in this essay, nevertheless Sekula presents him as a modernist photographer who ‘embraced the archival paradigm’ (ibid., p. 59), whilst Sander himself defined his vast project *People of the Twentieth Century* (*Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*) (unfinished, although he worked on it in some form from 1892 through to 1954) as one of classification



(Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004). Some 25,000 to 30,000 of the negatives from this project were destroyed by fire; only around 1800 survived, together with Sander's notes and his plans for a publication of the project. His photographs of different groups of people in this opus present us with a cross section of Weimar-era German society. Sander collected his portraits into seven named categories, which would direct the publication: the Farmer (Der Bauer); the Skilled Tradesman (Der Handwerker); the Woman (*Die Frau*); Classes and Professions (*Die Stände*); the Artists (*Die Künstler*); the City (*Die Großstadt*); and, the Last People (*Die Letzten Menschen*) (ibid.). Inside these broad groups, we can find diverse occupations, from philosopher to coalman. In 2002, the Sander Archive in Cologne published the seven-volume edition of the *People of the Twentieth Century* project. The 619 images in this publication are proof of a complex typological undertaking.

In his introduction to the plates reproduced in August Sander's *Face of Our Time*, a 1929 publication that contains just 60 portraits, representing a carefully chosen cross-section from *People of the Twentieth Century*, Alfred Döblin writes:

With his vision, his mind, his faculty of observation, his knowledge, and last but not least his immense photographic talent, Sander has succeeded in writing sociology not by writing, but by producing photographs [...] We are free to interpret his photographs in any way we wish, and taken as a whole, they provide superb material for the cultural, class and economic history of the last thirty years. (p. 13)

Döblin's notion that Sander's images can take the place of written evidence is critical to the position of the photograph in the archive. It is consistent with Sekula's idea that photographs are intrinsically archival, that they are 'an object and a means' of organization (1986, p. 57). They can be archived in the traditional sense, that is, they are objects that can be incorporated into the archive, where they are catalogued and described; equally, they can by themselves 'archive', as they describe a situation or a time.

Whilst Sekula sees Sander's approach as genuinely archival, he places serious doubt on the scientific rigour of the *People of the Twentieth Century* project. He is sceptical of Sander's methodology and sees his claims that the project is one of physiognomic investigation as a shrewd attempt to validate his artistic practice. 'I suspect Sander wanted to envelop his project in the legitimating aura of science without violating the esthetic coherence and semantic ambiguity of the traditional portrait form.' (1984, pp. 84-85) Gregorio Magnani describes *People of the Twentieth Century* as an exacting,



Figure 1.1 August Sander, *Master Mason* (1932).

© Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur—August Sander Archiv, Cologne / DACS 2019.

socially driven photographic undertaking, arguing that Sander's 'rigorously unemotional and partially self-effacing photographic style matches the complex interweaving of social, individual and historical factors that form the subject of the book. Each image is both an individualized portrait and an index of the sitter's participation in the social fabric of the times.' (1990, 81) These photographs would appear to have more to do with sociological and cultural documentation and analysis than with a particular branch of science.

It is very apparent that Sander's images are dressed and directed by the photographer for maximum impact, both social and affective. The subjects strike knowing poses, and although the pictures of workers often include the tools of their trade, these are not pictures of working life in action. Rather, Sander uses these tools as props: the coalman's basket; the pastrycook's mixing bowl; the master mason's neat stack of masonry blocks (Figure 1.1). On its website, National Galleries Scotland describes the master mason figure in the traditional language of art writing: 'The freshly assembled stacks both stabilize his contrapposto pose and frame him.'<sup>3</sup> It has been noted that many of these images make reference to works of art and popular culture: Sander's 1926 *Blacksmiths* is compared to aspects of Diego Velasquez' 1630 painting *La Fragua de Vulcano* (Vulcan's Forge), for example; images in his 'Types and Figures of the City' grouping have been connected with various George Grosz paintings; and his more comical figures, such as *Boxers*—the more athletic one of the two is pictured with his shoe laces tied together, whilst the other is sporting a wild grin—are aligned with the visual capers of Charlie Chaplin (Green, n.p.).

Whereas Sander's photographs from *People of the Twentieth Century* are aesthetically pleasing images that harbour the many of the trappings of traditional portraiture, Alphonse Bertillon, a Paris police official, produced images of the body that are bleak and equally lit, with no premeditated variation between shots in terms of lighting conditions, poses and backdrops. Bertillon worked with statistician Francis Galton for the Paris Police Archive in the late nineteenth century, using very carefully regulated photographic systems and formal documentation in order to unearth the so-called 'criminal type' (Figure 1.2). Sekula describes how Bertillon insisted on a standard focal length lens at all times, set at a designated distance to the subject and with controlled light conditions, in order to standardize the images produced (1986, p. 30). He identifies Bertillon as the technically minded one of the pair, whose aims were both practical and operational in his service for the Police Archive. He describes them as utilizing a sophisticated archival scheme, 'a bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of "intelligence"'. And he adds that the 'central artifact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet'. (ibid., pp. 16-19) Even before he employed photographic techniques, Bertillon used traditional clerical systems, collecting and filing precise measurements of the body. Data of this kind would morph into what we would now term

3 Available at <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/114344/master-mason-1926-1932> [Accessed 24 May 2019]



Figure 1.2 Alphonse Bertillon, albumen silver print from glass negative (1894). Recto showing photograph of Gaston Perot, verso identifying Perot as labourer and anarchist. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Gilman Collection).

image metadata, as it was linked to the photographic evidence that was pulled into the administrative machine.

Through photographic recording and complex statistical analysis, Bertillon and Galton's aim was 'to define and to regulate social deviance' (ibid., p. 19). Their study was particularly centred on the shape of the human head, which they believed would, through typological comparisons, provide a direct insight into the character. In his essay on early judicial photography Jens Jäger describes how commercial portrait photography—with its inherent respectability and link to the wealthy classes—was used to identify criminals even until the 1890s, when the more standardized methods advocated by Bertillon and Galton took over, drawing a line between the two practices (n.p.). This move would at least end one of the tensions between the social/aesthetic functions and the administrative roles of early photography, even if it did not address the more nuanced functions of Sander's work.

Bertillon and Galton's work with the human figure embodies the unadorned exactitude of scientific and archival administration. Sander's mission to identify and compare social classes by typological grouping, although less exacting, would still require image production and organization on a vast scale, in order to achieve what Döblin terms 'a kind of comparative

photography' (p. 13). Through a comparison of visual information amongst connected images, the understanding of a typology is improved; a complex visual language develops around a pre-determined and restricted type. This is sensitive and sinister territory when applied to humans, as it was by Sander—and by Bertillon and Galton, who gave it authority as they entered it into the administrative system of the Paris Police Archive. Through his declared interest in physiognomy, Sander puts himself up for accusations of stereotyping, and even of furthering certain positivist principles that were easily subsumed into the politics of National Socialism and their platform of racial eugenics. On the other hand, *Face of Our Time* met disapproval by the Nazis for its inclusion of more marginalized elements of society, such as gypsies. It is also argued that Sander believed that the use of photography moved the dissemination of knowledge away from text, which he saw as a channel for intellectuals, towards a more inclusive visual medium.<sup>4</sup> The comparative photography and statistical methods of Bertillon and Galton were, on the other hand *built* on positivism. Galton was not so much interested in criminology *per se*, as in the identification of a type—he is known as the founder of eugenics (he invented the term) with an interest in heredity and the control of human reproduction.

The concept of comparative photography can be explored outside of the charged arguments around physiognomic differences and the human form, through looking at the typological work of, for example, Bernd and Hilla Becher, where one can compare the structural differences of, for example, water towers, gas tanks and pitheads. Magnani cites the Bechers as drawing on strategies that can be traced back to Sander:

Meaning undergoes a circular series of displacements that transfer significance from a single image, to a comparison between similar images, to the overall project that brings the images together, to the conditions that produced the project as they are instanced in the individual images. It is only through their participation in a system of presentation, under the model of the archive, that the single images gain a significance which is larger than their particular instances. (pp. 81-82)

The image set, 'the model of the archive', thus becomes more important than any single image, whose significance wanes. Here Sander and Sekula

4 See Rose-Carol Washington Long (2013) 'August Sander's Portraits of Persecuted Jews', *Tate Papers*, no.19, Spring 2013. Available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/19/august-sanders-portraits-of-persecuted-jews>. [Accessed 6 April 2018]

(as photographer) meet: Sekula's intense interest in the archive surfaces in his own photographic work, through his long-form documentary text-image projects such as *Aerospace Folktales* (1973) and his piece *Meditations on a Tryptich* (1973-1978), where he provides a 4000-plus words—part descriptive, part speculative—based around a set of three simple family snapshots (see Chapter 2). Roula Seikaly, in her essay 'Allan Sekula Against the Grain', written shortly after his untimely death in 2013, argues that 'Sekula places particular emphasis on work arranged by sequenced, relational images in conveying meaning, and resisting the postmodern construction of the singular, authoritative, commoditized photograph.' (n.p.) The idea of the relational image points decisively to the all-important, context building, part-to-whole relationships that exist inside the archive institution. The photograph, through its incorporation into the archive and its proximity to other related materials, is de-commoditized—it is read as a piece in the puzzle rather than as an authoritative statement in its own right.

## Seeing off the old artistic ideals

In the second half of the nineteenth century the quest for the fine art photograph was ill-fated, as it was driven and judged by traditional romantic and artistic ideals that had been laid down and studied over centuries. Photographic portraiture, in particular, attempted to continue the tradition of painting as a medium for capturing and preserving the human character for posterity. As Benjamin remarks, 'It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuse for the cult value of the picture' (1999 [1935], p. 219)—or the 'aura', as already discussed. Nineteenth-century art critics tended to regard photography as nothing more than a copyist's medium, one that could never achieve the same status as the fine arts (Sekula, 2003, p. 448). In the eyes of the general public, when compared to painting (as it naturally would be, simply in terms of the creation of a likeness) photography was in essence a new and unfamiliar technology, an efficient means of reproduction that was somewhat devalued by its missing historical distance. In reality, photography was busy building its own history—it was in a rapid state of change, both in terms of its operation across different areas of interest and in terms of technological development. Moreover, it can be traced back technically to earlier means of mechanical and chemical reproduction.

Photography would need to shake off this perceived subservient relationship to painting before it could be acknowledged by the public as anything other than a medium that aimed to mimic the affect of past art forms. Commercial portrait photographers tried to artificially bind photography to painting by bringing in cheap props and backgrounds, both as 'signifiers of their personal achievements' (Henning, p. 108), and also in an attempt to create the immediate and familiar historical context of painting. In popular terms, photography was a relatively cheap a substitute for portrait painting with a 'sitting' that was quick and a result that was reproducible. It produced artefacts that could be shared, such as the now collectable *carte de visite*, prevalent in the 1850s and '60s, again fully dressed with props—and with an appealingly ornate lithographic image on the verso that identified the photographer's studio and at the same time brought an artistic dimension to the object. Visiting cards became so popular that in 1854 André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdèri, photographer and pioneer of the *carte de visite*, patented a way of producing many images on one plate, probably utilizing Antoine Claudet's 'multiplying camera-obscura', so as to cut down processing costs and speed up reproduction of these popular artefacts (Hudson).

But the absence of the human hand (a recognizable presence in painting) could not be remedied with any amount of scenery and props. Perhaps this feeling still lingers to a certain extent, even though we are now used to the lack of evidence of the human hand in most aspects of everyday life, through our acceptance of new technologies. These technologies are still based upon human endeavour but keep this aspect well hidden. Victor Burgin argues thus:

The surface of the photograph offers no reassurance of the founding presence of a human subject. It is either glossy, 'slick', or it is matt, 'implacable'—both appearances are grounds for suspicion. From a distance the surface offers seamless modulation of tones which seem distributed at the arbitrary whim of a brute and contingent reality, examined closely it fragments into infinitely evenly-spaced dispersions of grains—we can find no trace of an author. No humanity, only *technology*—optical, chemical, electronic—and there is no more fiercely defended tenet of the humanist faith today than that of the alien and alienating nature of modern technology. (1986, p. 34)

In reality, photography, especially in its earliest form, was an extremely 'hands on' activity. Julia Margaret Cameron's early experimental photographs, which explicitly show the human side of their production, came up for criticism for being slovenly and defective at the time of their making.

Working in the 1860s, with cumbersome equipment and in difficult and makeshift conditions, her photographs presented technical flaws that occurred throughout capture, developing and printing. Cameron embraced pictures that would most likely be rejected by her contemporaries, utilizing the imperfections that came about both inside and outside the camera, and even building upon them. Her photographs are now widely recognized as visionary works, and through their imperfections they act as an insight into the mechanisms of early photography.<sup>5</sup>

The complicated processes and the use of optical and chemically based technologies—not fully understood by the general public—precipitated widespread suspicion of the new medium. Henry Fox Talbot's book *The Pencil of Nature* was published in 1844 and Sekula describes it as 'a lavish book that was not only the first to be illustrated with photographic prints, but also a compendium of wide-ranging and prescient meditations on the promise of photography'. (1986, pp. 5-6) Through this book Fox Talbot tries to lessen public suspicion of the technological, non-human aspects of photography, firstly by way of his cleverly chosen title that suggests the involvement of the hand and positions photography as an extension of other less technologically focused visual arts, and, secondly, by prefacing his plates with an explanation of the term 'photography' and a lengthy explanation of how he came upon the 'new art'. He includes a description of the chemicals and the processes used—and this was all written in a relaxed and informal style, as if he were recounting the whole process to his audience personally. Fox Talbot saw himself as a polymath and especially as an amateur scientist, but he saw his work as art. Notably, he references the Dutch school in his notes to 'Plate VI. The Open Door', where a broom is casually placed across an open doorway in a style reminiscent of seventeenth-century Dutch painting (ibid.).

Sekula charts the progression of photography's break with fine art in first part of the twentieth century. This is very much in the context of modernist principles of the heroic artist—authorial weight and medium specificity in photography are set against the rise of less painterly, more mechanized and archival aesthetics:

The protomodernism of the Photo Secession and its affiliated movements, extending roughly to 1916, can be seen as an attempt to resist

5 See the Victoria and Albert Museum webpage for brief insights into Julia Margaret Cameron's working methods <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/julia-margaret-cameron-working-methods/> [Accessed 27 October 2019]



the achival [sic] mode through a strategy of avoidance and denial based on craft production. The elegant *few* were opposed to the mechanized *many*, in terms both of images and authors. This strategy required the ostentatious display of the 'honorific marks of hand labor', to borrow the phrase coined by the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen in 1899. After 1916, however, aesthetically ambitious photographers abandoned the painterly and embraced pictorial rhetorics much closer to those already operative within the instrumental realist and archival paradigms. (ibid., pp. 58-59 [original italics])

Here Sekula cites Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston as obvious examples of 'the elegant *few*', and Sander on the other side (as has already been noted). Yet he does not see this as an easy demarcation between archival and non-archival. He identifies Walker Evans as a photographer who attempted to combine the poetics of sequence photography with the archival model—for example with his 1938 work *American Photographs* (ibid., p. 59). Once again the idea of the human hand emerges, and Sekula, writing against the backdrop of postmodernism, frames it as a pretentious and craft-driven effect.

## Science, description and optics

As demonstrated by the work of Bertillon and Galton for the Paris Police Archive, photographic images used for authentic scientific research were classified with an archival rigour, and it was exactly because of its somewhat unpopular cold characteristics that early photography was assigned to scientific enquiry and classification. The timing was impeccable for both photography and science: this was made explicit in the exhibition *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-1900*, at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) in 2008. The exhibition surveyed a period when science and photography were in parallel states of rapid development, and scientists were using cameras in conjunction with other optical devices.

In the exhibition catalogue, Tom Gunning argues that these images functioned 'not simply to record a recognizable world, but also to provide images of a previously invisible one'. (in Keller, p. 54). Jussi Parikka, as part of a media archaeological discourse around visual reproduction as a part of technological modernity, discusses the emergence of 'the science of the image' and references scientist Robert Koch (1834-1910), who in his 1881 text '*Zur Untersuchung von pathogenen Organismen*' states that 'the photographic

picture of a microscopic object can under certain circumstances be more important than [the object] itself' (Parikka, 2012, p. 21). New scientific imaging techniques not only directly produced new knowledge, new objects, and new classifications, importantly, they also *made possible* certain types of thereto impossible scientific investigation. In the same way, modern scientific imaging techniques, including ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and advanced microscopy (all largely focusing on 3D imaging technologies) have in more recent times afforded new research possibilities in the field of biomedical sciences.

There was at this time a growing appetite amongst the general public for knowledge about the workings of the natural world. In his foreword to the SFMOMA exhibition catalogue Neal Benezra writes about this: 'Circulated among scientists but also avidly consumed by the general public, these mesmerizing pictures provoked something of a sea change—a radical reconsideration of how the world around us was perceived and understood.' (in Keller, p. 13) Walter Benjamin, in his essay 'A Short History of Photography',<sup>6</sup> was fascinated by the ability of the camera—and other optical devices—to record and reproduce things that were invisible to the human eye. With reference to psychoanalysis, he points also to a new and deeper understanding of the world:

Photography makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious, just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious. Structural qualities, cellular tissues, which form the natural business of technology and medicine are all much more closely related to the camera than to the atmospheric landscape or the expressive portrait. At the same time photography uncovers in this material physiognomic aspects of pictorial words which live in the smallest things, perceptible yet covert enough to find shelter in daydreams, but which, once enlarged and capable of formulation, show the difference between technology and magic to be entirely a matter of historical variables.

He continues: 'It is possible, for example, however roughly, to describe the way somebody walks, but it is impossible to say anything about that fraction of a second when a person *starts to walk*. Photography with its various aids

6 Walter Benjamin's 'A Short History of Photography' was originally published in three parts in *Literarische Welt*, in 1931. Benjamin is in awe of the camera's ability to capture things invisible to the eye, yet at the same time he expresses regret for the demise of the art of miniature painting, due to the ease of small-scale photographic reproduction.

(lens, enlargements) can reveal this moment.’ (1972 [1931], pp. 7-8) Although Benjamin speaks of the practical advantages of an image over language to describe, this is in the context of describing an action, a moment or a detail that would normally be missed by the human eye. It must be noted that it is quite different to the describing of an existing image, where it is possible for that same information to be revealed through language.

Long before the inception of photography, the need to understand the world by image—to reveal, to classify and to reproduce—was driven by studies in the natural sciences. As the complexities of the natural world were made more apparent, there was increasing demand to reproduce it in minute and flawless detail. In 1640, John Parkinson, a London pharmacist who held the impressive title of Royal Apothecary to James I and was later appointed chief botanist to Charles I, produced *Theatrum botanicum: The Theatre of Plants, or An Herball of a Large Extent*. This publication contains numerous illustrations in the form of woodcuts, together with descriptions of more than 4000 plants, intended for the benefit of other pharmacists. It was just one amongst a plethora of ‘herbals’ produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—many of them associated with quackery—but it is Parkinson who, in his short text at the front end of the publication entitled ‘To the Reader’, acknowledges the problems of imaging and describing parts of plants with such meticulous detail, stating apologetically that others will come after him ‘having younger and clearer eyes’ (p. 7).

Just 15 years after Parkinson’s death, the naked eye was to be augmented by optical devices, enabling graphic artists to image the world in greater detail. In 1665 Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia, or some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies, made by Magnifying Glasses, with Observations and Inquiries Thereupon*, was published. It contained engravings—note that Hooke terms them descriptions—that were the first to be made with the aid of a microscope. Hooke, in his preface, writes about the infinite possibilities of the microscope to reveal the world: ‘there is nothing so far distant but may be represented to our view; and by the help of Microscopes, there is nothing so small, as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible World discovered to the understanding’. Hooke’s use of optics resulted in striking illustrations that revealed previously invisible detail, and illustration—with or without the aid of the microscope—continued as the principal mode of recording and classification in the natural sciences. Drawings were reproduced using various print technologies as they became available. Intaglio techniques such as photogravure, or heliogravure, used by pioneers of photography such as Nicéphore Niépce and Henry Fox Talbot to mechanically reproduce photographic images, were directly descended

from the early sixteenth-century etching processes that would have been used for classification.

In parallel to these image-making practices that meticulously describe the natural world, scientific enquiry and classification was apparent in written works, both with and without accompanying images, and with styles of description and analysis emerging that were both poetic and encyclopaedic. In examining the differences between these methods of description in enlightenment France, Joanna Stalnaker, in her 2016 essay 'Description and the Nonhuman View of Nature', draws our attention to the scientific descriptions of Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton, who worked with fellow naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon on the multivolume *Histoire naturelle*,<sup>7</sup> a work which was said to prompt a renewed interest in natural history across Europe when it was published in 1758, at the height of the Enlightenment. Stalnaker provides examples of the two naturalists' diverse styles in *Histoire naturelle* through their respective descriptions of a squirrel. Daubenton's description sits alongside illustrations of the squirrel, including images of the animal being dissected—and this is indeed a textual dissection: it is unembellished and scientific in its use of language, and includes dry technical data such as measurements and angles. In complete contrast, Buffon gives the animal a personality and a life, with a 'pretty face' and human behaviour traits: 'he generally holds himself in sitting position nearly standing up, and uses his front paws, like a hand, to bring things to his mouth'. Buffon, in moving description away from the scientific and observational approach, considered himself to be contributing to the popularization of science; he also had a literary career to uphold (Stalnaker, pp. 75-78) and perhaps he worried that an overtly encyclopaedic writing style would hinder him in this respect.

Hooke's illustrations through the microscope, such as that of the common louse (Figure 1.3), were complemented by his text descriptions. He was writing almost a hundred years before *Histoire naturelle* was published, and before the boundaries between science and literature were so heavily policed by experts such as eminent naturalist and zoologist Georges Cuvier, who termed the mid-eighteenth century 'the age of description' (ibid., p. 73). We can see from Hooke's description of the louse that he incorporates the

7 Stalnaker is here referring to Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon and Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton (1758) *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière, avec la description du Cabinet du Roy*, (Paris). The original publication consisted of 38 volumes and sold out with six weeks of publication. By the beginning of the nineteenth century it had been translated into several languages and different imprints included various updates and additions.

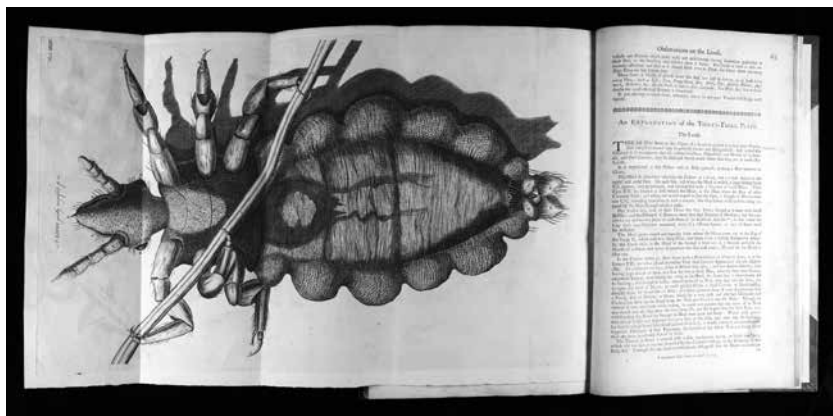


Figure 1.3 Illustration and description of the louse from Robert Hooke, *Microscopic Observations or Dr Hooke's Wonderful Discoveries by the Microscope* (London, Printed for Robert Wilkinson, 1780). Courtesy of the Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Rare Books quarto QH 271.

styles of both Daubenton and Buffon, as the language morphs from poetic and personal into scientific and observational in the space of a paragraph:

This is a Creature so officious, that 'twill be known to every one at one time or other, so busie, and so impudent, that it will be intruding it self in every ones company, and so proud and aspiring withall, that it fears not to trample on the best, and affects nothing so much as a Crown; feeds and lives very high, and that makes it so saucy, as to pull any one by the ears that comes in its way, and will never be quiet till it has drawn blood: it is troubled at nothing so much as at a man that scratches his head, as knowing that man is plotting and contriving some mischief against it, and that makes it oftentime sculk into some meaner and lower place, and run behind a mans back, though it go very much against the hair; which ill conditions of it having made it better known then trusted, would exempt me from making any further description of it, did not my faithful *Mercury*, my *Microscope*, bring me other information of it. For this has discovered to me, by means of a very bright light cast on it, that it is a Creature of a very odd shape; it has a head shap'd like that exprest in 35. *Scheme* marked with A, which seems almost Conical, but is a little flatted on the upper and under sides, at the biggest part of which, on either side behind the head (as it were, being the place where other Creatures ears stand) are placed its two black shining goggle eyes BB, looking backwards, and fenced round with several small *cilia*, or hairs that incompass it, so that it seems this Creature has no very good

foresight: It does not seem to have any eye-lids, and therefore perhaps its eyes were so placed, that it might the better cleanse them with its fore-legs; and perhaps this may be the reason, why they so much avoid and run from the light behind them, for being made to live in the shady and dark recesses of the hair, and thence probably their eye having a great aperture, the open and clear light, especially that of the Sun, must needs very much offend them [...]

'35. Scheme' is the title of the illustration of the louse, and the letters 'BB' refer to the labels placed upon it. As with Buffon's contributions to the *Histoire Naturelle*, the image and description here lie side by side in a double-page spread, an interconnected and multimodal display of scientific investigation. The placement of image and description together is known as 'collocation', and more is said about this in relation to the functions of image description in Chapter 3. Hooke's dry description of the louse's head is remarkably similar to Daubenton's later description of the squirrel's head: 'The forehead is flat, and its plane is oriented in the same direction as that of the nose; the back part of the top of the head appears elevated, and the ears are positioned on each side.' Yet Hooke seems to embrace a splash of imagination, personality and opinion—for the sake of composition and readability—as long as scientific rigour is also maintained. The scientific rigour is demonstrable in the illustrations, of course.

## Art or document

In an archive setting, the primary purpose of the photograph is to function as a document of evidence and information. It is fully accepted, catalogued and described as such, alongside all the many forms of document that can be found there. Lisa Gitelman, in her media history of documents, points out that the word 'document' comes from the Latin root *docere*, to show or teach; the document *exists* in order to document (p. 1). The tensions between the framing of the photograph as art or as document were there from the start, and have been discussed in detail, but even though the applications of photography rapidly diversified, the same conflicts were to continue through the twentieth century.

This is brought to light in a particular debate over Julia van Haften's reorganization of the New York Public Library. Douglas Crimp describes this undertaking, taking place at the time of his writing in 1989, as an attempt to elevate already organized sets of documentary photographs to the level of

art. He gives examples: 'urban poverty becomes Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine; portraits *of* Delacroix and Manet become portraits *by* Nadar and Carjat; Dior's New Look becomes Irving Penn; and World War II becomes Robert Capa' (p. 7 [original italics]). He explains how collections of images of an event are 'reclassified according to their newly acquired value, the value that is now attached to the "artists" who made the photographs'. Crimp traces this reorganization exercise back to John Szarkowski (director of MoMA's Department of Photography from 1962 to 1991) and what he interprets as Szarkowski's modernist vision of photography. That is to say, as an art form, a medium of subjectivity and contemplation—traits that Walter Benjamin was arguing against some fifty years earlier.

Crimp argues that postmodernism is the culprit for the redistribution of knowledge that appeared to be taking place across cultural sites and institutions at this time (p. 8). In 2001, archival theorist Terry Cook, in his essay 'Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts', similarly makes case for a redistribution of knowledge, this time inside the archive institution, but also in the name of postmodernism. He argues strongly that archivists must re-consider how they approach their discipline in a postmodern world. To this end, he calls for a change in archival practice to one that moves away from the 'guardianship' of the document into a mode of 'actively shaping collective (or social) memory'. (pp. 3-4) In taking this approach, he draws on the broad themes of poststructuralism put forward by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, with their respective ideas on understanding and dismantling 'systems of organized knowledge'. He rightly cites Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1998) as the text that spawned a wave of studies on the archive's significance in society (p. 6). However, in writing from the standpoint of the archivist and the implications of postmodernism for their profession, he pays little attention to the role of the researcher in what Foucault posits in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as 'the questioning of the *document*'. (2002, p. 6 [original italics]); or to the important part that archivists have traditionally played in affording this questioning, by taking an approach that is based on the techniques of recordkeeping.

Postmodernism was already on the wane by the time Cook's article was published, but it was at the point where archives were beginning, with some trepidation, to properly enter the digital realm and Cook is preoccupied with the new ordering and re-ordering mechanisms facilitated by the digitization and networking of images. With this aspect in mind, he argues that there should be 'a shift away from viewing records as static physical objects, and towards understanding them as dynamic virtual concepts'

(p. 4). But it is clear that in the *physical* archive objects are both static (on the shelves) and dynamic (in the hands of the researcher). Archivists have always acknowledged this and it is precisely why their cataloguing and ordering methods are comprehensive, neutral and future proof. The kind of reorganization carried out by Van Haaften physically and suggested by Cook in the digital milieu is key to the status of the archive object (photograph or other), whose significance as document is undermined once it is removed from its original context—hence the emphasis on recording and preserving original order, and the growing anxiety over the deregulated storage spaces of the internet, an aspect acknowledged but its extent not fully apparent at the time of Cook's writing.

Crimp describes the image as 'ghettoized' through its journey from archive to museum, arguing, 'It will no longer primarily be useful within other discursive practices; it will no longer serve the purposes of information, documentation, evidence, illustration, reportage. The formerly plural field of photography will henceforth be reduced to the single, all-encompassing *aesthetic*.' (p. 7 [original italics]) Perhaps ghettoization is a somewhat contentious term when be applied to the rearrangement of photographs, but Crimp uses the word precisely in the framework of the de-contextualization of these photographs: to ghettoize is to segregate, to confine to a particular area or category and, in doing so, to strip out any cultural or political power.

Sekula divides the document-into-art transformation into two categories; the first tied up with romanticism and authorial voice—this would apply to the reorganization of the Capa photographs; the second as post-romantic, privileging the subjectivity of the collector over the author, a path that treats photographs as 'found objects' (2003, p. 448-449). This second path is the one that archive objects typically take when they are lifted from their place in the archive: they become found objects (often authorless to start with) that are used in diverse ways across different platforms. However, if they carry with them no reference to their context, they are lost as documents.

In order to further define the relationship between art and photographic document, in his essay 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' Sekula takes two historical examples, and he appears to take on the role of archivist in examining them. The two photographs he chooses are Lewis Hine's *Immigrants Going Down Gangplank, New York* (1905) and Alfred Stieglitz' *The Steerage* (1907). Sekula notes that these two images share the same 'rather narrow iconographic terrain', and he attempts to lay bare these photographs by describing them in a naïve manner. In doing so, he provides a surprisingly accurate delivery of archival cataloguing techniques, where images are described discretely and neutrally, as he explains his methodology



as, 'divesting both images of context, as though I and the photographs fell from the sky'. He describes the photographs thus:

In the Hine photo, a gangplank extends horizontally across the frame, angling outward, towards the camera. A man, almost a silhouette, appears ready to step up on to the gangplank. He carries a bundle, his body is almost halved by the right edge of the photo. Two women precede the man across the gangplank. Both are dressed in long skirts; the woman on the left, who is in the lead, carries a large suitcase. [...] In the Stieglitz photo, a gangplank, broken by the left border, extends across an open hold intersecting an upper deck. Both this upper deck and the one below are crowded with people: women in shawls, Slavik-looking women in black scarves holding babies, men in collarless shirts and workers' caps. Some of the people are sitting, some appear to be engaged in conversation. (1982, pp. 88-90)

These descriptions could have been ripped straight out of an archive catalogue: they define the geometrical divisions in the image; they make reference to the camera; they provide details on clothing and objects. Note also Sekula's use of the word 'appear'; this is word that is embedded in the language of the archive, as the description writer needs to demonstrate caution around objects or situations that are visually unclear; appearances can be deceptive and this needs to be articulated at times—there is more on this in Chapter 3. In the case of the Hine photograph, Sekula admits that he has been helped by the caption, saying, 'it would be somewhat difficult to identify either the gangplank or the immigrant status of the three figures without the aid of the legend'. He goes on to say that although the descriptions are 'deadpan' they are not 'innocent'. He believes he has made certain assumptions and described them 'as though they were stills from the same movie, a documentary on immigration perhaps'. This is an insight into the many complexities of archival description. Furthermore, the viewpoints that both Crimp and Sekula present are continually applicable in terms of the problematic status of the networked image: digital objects can be moved, reassigned, and re-valued in a click, and often with no reference to their provenance. In the age of cloud storage, networked images present themselves precisely and metaphorically as if they fell from the sky.

The call for postmodernization, in the archive and elsewhere, has passed, and anyway one hopes that a major museum would not today permanently break up a collection in the name of art, as it did in the reorganization of the New York Public Library. Rather, the museum might embrace the model

of the archive, perhaps following examples such as that set by the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA). In 2015, on acquiring a complete set of the 619 images that make up Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century*, the Museum, together with Columbia University, embarked on a five-year programme, the 'August Sander Project', to explore this collection, inviting 49 scholars, made up of critics, curators, historians, and artists, to pick one of Sander's portfolios and present their views at a series of five annual, one-day symposiums. (Green, n.p.) The unrestricted themes addressed by scholars so far in the MoMA project illustrate the inherent dynamism of a collection—how it can be endlessly reconfigured, whilst remaining intact.

In the wider art world, and outside of photography as a specific medium, the work that was being made in the 1960s seemed to be on a mission to rid itself of the constraints of depiction, with the sharp ascent of non-representational and conceptual art. Photographers saw their activity as becoming marginalized and somehow less intellectual when compared to the contemporary avant-garde. There was a realization (not new, of course) that imitating photojournalism would get art photography out of the representational mode that it was stuck with. Writer and photographer Jeff Wall cites the 'rethinking and "refunctioning" of *reportage*' [original italics] as a direction through which photography would try to get beyond what he terms 'sheer picture-making'. (1995, p. 248) The use of text alongside the journalistic photographic image was a device that was borrowed from documentary publications and, quite curiously, the photographic image made a circular journey from old-style pictorialism to new art object, via what Wall classes as photojournalism's 'utilitarian' object (we might call this the 'document'). The journalistic photo-essay format was perceived as a way of contesting the autonomy of the art photograph: the photographs illustrated the text and the composite parts were subsumed into the message of the whole. But Wall explains how this idea was to break down, with Dan Graham's ground-breaking photo-text piece *Homes for America* (1966-7) never actually being published as a photojournalistic work, instead surfacing in lithographic print form, which Wall termed 'an imitation of the non-autonomous'. (ibid., p. 257)

The issue at the heart of the problem above is that depiction is what photography does; the rendering of an accurate picture of what is in front of the camera lens is what it is really good at. This characteristic, which Tom Gunning calls the 'truth claim' (p. 39), is unpicked, redefined and reasserted for the digital age by both Gunning and Martin Lister, who see little change in the indexical nature of the image in the digital era. Lister (p. 252) defends indexicality across the digital, asking, 'Is there so much at

stake when the indexical quality of a photographic image is registered by an array of charge coupled devices rather than silver salts or electro-magnetic particles?’ So, even if we identify the digital image as a piece of code and scrutinize it as such, it still stands up to the truth claim. And Gunning argues along the same lines:

The fact that rows of numbers do not resemble a photograph does not undermine any indexical claim. An index need not (and frequently does not) resemble the thing it represents. The indexicality of a traditional photograph inheres in the effect of light on chemicals, not in the picture it produces. The rows of numerical data produced by a digital camera and the image of traditional chemical photography are both indexically determined by objects outside the camera. (p. 41)

There have been many challenges to the truth and accuracy of the digital image, for the most part stemming from the opportunities available for manipulation, for ‘photoshopping’ as it is widely known, although of course analogue images can be—and have been—manipulated too. Barthes cites as the example the iconic press photo of Millard Tydings and Earl Browder (1977, p. 21). These were two American politicians who at that point (1950) had never met in person, but were put together in a composite image for overtly political ends, in order to smear Tydings with a connection to the leader of the American Communist Party.

Archival description makes no distinction between the digital and the analogue in regard to the visual content it catalogues, although the description may identify processes and traces of manipulation in both, if they are visible and can be described. The ‘spirit photographs’ in the Harry Price Archive have quite clearly been subject to manipulation outside the camera. This is smartly flagged up in the descriptions of these photographs, and without disturbing the adherence to the recording of visual content. The descriptions define what is depicted, but they suggest through their writing that the images are not what they seem: quotation marks are inserted around certain words, for example in the description of the spirit photograph of Price himself (Figure 1.4): ‘Spirit photograph by William Hope featuring Harry Price as sitter and featuring the “spirit” of Price’s mother.’ Furthermore, descriptions of Prices lecture slides provide evidence into the ways that some of the ‘spirit photographs’ were manipulated:

410. How accidents can produce ‘spirit’ extras (Caused by accidental double exposure)



Figure 1.4 Spirit photograph by William Hope featuring Harry Price as sitter and featuring the 'spirit' of Price's mother (c.1922).  
University of London, Senate House Library.

411. As above (Caused by halation from white suit)
422. Effect of radio active minerals on sensitised silver emulsion in an unopened box of photographic plates. The markings were caused by (right, top) Joachimsthal pitchblende; (right, centre) thorium; (right, bottom) crystal of uranium nitrate; (left, bottom) Cornish pitchblende (HPG/2)

## Document as embedded art practice

The document (in the form of text, or image, or text *and* image) is now a conventional part of art practice; the two are no longer in head to head conflict. Any tension between art and document now forms part of a positive critical methodology for many artists who include photography in their practice. The ways in which the documentary, indexical and performative procedures of the archive are shifted into the systems of art and poetic practice will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, but at this point I want to flag up examples of photo-based art projects whose methods are particularly aligned with the themes of archivization that have been discussed in this chapter. The cyclical life of the photographic image, as it moves from pictorialism, through the utilitarian object, to new art object, as outlined by Jeff Wall (1995, p. 35), is addressed at some level by all of these projects.

Taryn Simon is a photographer whose works repeatedly intersects with the archive, with works such as *American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (2007), *Contraband* (2010), and *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I-XVIII*, (2008-2011) all utilizing archival themes and methodologies. Hans Ulrich Obrist argues in his 'Ever Airport: Notes on Taryn Simon's Contraband', a foreword to the book of the *Contraband* project—a project in which Simon photographs items illegally imported into the U.S. and seized by the authorities, over a five day timespan at John F. Kennedy airport—the photographs are 'something approaching the approximately impersonal and administrative form of the list'. Obrist continues, 'the photographs and texts of Simon's Contraband reveal disorder and chance within the strictures of a system determined by absolute order and control [...] Simon's images and lists embrace both order and disorder, and open up a third space within the cracks of these forms of control.' (p. 9) The 'administrative form of the list' immediately connects with notions of record-keeping and archival practices, and the 'third space' can be read in the context of the unruliness of original order, with its discontinuities and unexpected associations that are further deliberated in Chapter 3.

In a taxonomic play on fact and fiction, tied up with historical classificatory practices in the natural sciences, Simon's *Birds of the West Indies* (2013-2014) is most pertinent here, as it harks back to the early classificatory uses of photography discussed in this chapter. The piece takes its title and its inspiration from a publication by American ornithologist James Bond (1900-1989), and its extended story. Bond was an expert on Caribbean birds, and his book is regarded as the definitive text on the subject. It was first published in 1936 with no colour plates, but converted into a field guide, with colour plates added, in a subsequent publication of 1947. Novelist Ian Fleming was a bird watcher himself and had a home in Jamaica. In looking for a name for his now famous spy thriller hero, he decided to take Bond's inconspicuous name from the field guide. According to Kenneth Parkes' obituary of the *real* James Bond, in a 1960 review of a revised version of the field guide 'cryptic reference was made to sadomasochism, Smith and Wesson guns, and other aspects of life utterly unlike that of James Bond of Philadelphia'. In 1966, Bond's wife Mary wrote her own short book, reportedly in good humour, entitled *How 007 Got his Name* (Parkes, pp. 718-720). According to the website *Bond Lifestyle*,<sup>8</sup> which positions itself as 'the most stylish and clear online guide to the gadgets, the clothes, the cars, the travel locations and the gambling habits of the most suave secret agent', the real James Bond's 1960 version of *Birds of the West Indies* features as a prop in the Bond film *Die Another Day* (2002), as well as in a promotional image for the film *Spectre*.

In her own version of *Birds of the West Indies*, which presents as exhibition and publication, Taryn Simon takes up the story of the two Bonds, and in her new incarnation of the title the ornithologist and the secret agent converge once again. In the press release for her 2014 exhibition of the work at the Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills (pp. 1-2), the first section of Simon's two-part piece is described as comprising of 'a photographic inventory of the women, innovative weaponry and luxury cars of Bond films made over the past fifty years'. It is accompanied by Simon's film about an uncelebrated Bond voice-over artist, Nikki van der Zyl. The second part of the piece is another work of classification. In parallel with the original *Birds of the West Indies*, Simon plays the part of the ornithologist herself. Working more like a CCTV analyst than a traditional bird-watcher, she combs every scene in every film in the Bond franchise, capturing and classifying each bird that

8 See <http://www.jamesbondlifestyle.com/product/birds-west-indies-james-bond> [Accessed 3 November 2019]

appears in a frame, whether by intention or by chance (sometimes birds fly into scenes uninvited).

Presenting fictional situations, chance occurrences and fantastic collections, this piece functions as one of institutional critique, questioning archive-related notions of evidence, ownership and authority and presenting the findings through an archival, documentary aesthetic. The press release states, 'the birds are categorized by locations both actual and fictional: Switzerland, Afghanistan, North Korea, as well as the mythical settings of Bond's missions, such as the Republic of Isthmus and SPECTRE Island'. It goes on to describe how some of the birds are 'frozen in compositions reminiscent of different genres of photographic history'. (Gagosian, pp. 1-2) Much of the photography here is fleeting, noisy and imperfect, as if the subjects were caught in the field, which of course they are, if the screen is to be regarded as the field. Within this idiosyncratic art project lies genuine archival research, especially in the context of exploring the recurring ornithological connections between the two Bonds. The exhibition places papers, correspondence and other objects belonging to the real James Bond alongside the photographic work, adding to the archival thematic. As well as the exhibition and the *Birds of the West Indies* book, published in 2013, the taxonomy of 331 birds is also published separately, as *A Field Guide to the Birds of the West Indies* (2016).

Fiona Banner's book *All the World's Fighter Planes 2004* is a visual taxonomy of fighter aircraft through a page-by-page collage of found images, roughly cut from newspaper articles on war and conflict. Like Simon's birds caught in the frame of the film, Banner's aircraft are caught in flight, pictured at different angles and at different sizes, some full page, some extremely small. The 154 planes and helicopters are listed on the front and back covers of the publication, acting as a very visible index to this classificatory work, highlighting the artist's long-term engagement with language as well as image, and paralleling the way that archive images are first met by text in the form of catalogue list. There is no other text in this book, except for small fragments of residual text, often unreadable, left showing around the images as evidence of their provenance in publications. In Stephen Bury's review of *All the World's Fighter Planes 2004* in *Art Monthly* of June 2005, he argues: 'One wants to read the text that was next to the photograph before each was cut out: the fragmentary—"RAF harriers were sent in to end the siege" demands full contextualization—what siege? when? what happened next? The book is therefore charged by a frustration of narrative expectations.' Bury is an information professional; at the time of writing this review he was head of European & American

Collections at the British Library, so his frustration at the lack of context is understandable. In his *Art Monthly* piece, reproduced on the artist's website, he recalls how Banner, at her book launch, remarked that the book was 'all about nature', and he explains how that the names of the aircraft mirror and interrogate nature and that they reference both aircraft- and nature-related classificatory manuals:

This can be taken literally: the bird-watcher and plane-spotter (and their manuals, and their banal-listings of observations) are no doubt closely related. The names of the planes, too provide a lexicon of nature, adopting the names of birds and animals—albatross, hornet, hind, cayuse, eagle, cougar, lion cub, cheetah, aardvark, nighthawk, badger, foxbat, pelican, tiger, stallion, panther, osprey, puma, warthog, and bear—as well as climatic phenomena such as the tornado and chinook [...] Even their series numbers perhaps reflect some genus and species numbering in some evolutionary classification. (n.p.)

In 2010, Banner exhibited her piece *Harrier and Jaguar* in the Duveen Gallery at Tate Britain, part of what Michael Spens, in *Studio International*, describes as 'a twenty-year obsession with military aircraft'. (n.p.) These two authentic machines appeared completely and ironically out of context in the Gallery setting; this is not even a modern gallery that might have the look of an aircraft hangar, but Tate Britain, with its classical pillars, arched doorways and skylights. The Jaguar appeared as a shiny, polished silver apparition, tilted, one wing resting on the ground, whereas the Harrier, suspended with its black painted beak pointing down and almost touching the gallery floor, once again adopted a bird-like persona, as Banner covered it with hand drawn outlines of feathers. Spens interprets the treatments of these surfaces as a stealthy feminist reference to the nature of aircraft as 'She-object', as promoted by pilots and technicians (n.p.). But the feathered Harrier is as much a reference to the bird-object, and to the position of the grounded specimen of natural science in the traditional museum setting.

My final example is Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's 2013 project *Spirit is a Bone* exhibited as a grid of images as part of the *British Art Show 8*, touring between 2015 and 2017; and published as a series in a book of the same name in 2016. The two artists used advanced facial recognition technology to produce a number of striking portraits. They knowingly and openly reference Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century*, with modern-day Russia taking the place of Weimer Germany. The artists articulate





Figure 1.5 Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin Yekaterina Samutsevic, of Pussy Riot, from Broomberg and Chanarin's series of portraits *Spirit is a Bone* (2013).  
© Broomberg & Chanarin; Courtesy the artists and Lisson Gallery.

'disturbing parallels' between the two locations. (Broomberg et al, p. 231) Sander's categories are used as a framework for their piece, as they produce portraits of bankers, revolutionaries, bricklayers and so on, all of whom were encountered on Moscow streets. Re-presenting Sander's project in a way appropriate to our time, they use, for example, Yekaterina Samutsevic of Pussy Riot as their 'Revolutionary' (Figure 1.5), and conceptual writer Lev Rubinstein as their 'Poet'.

The specially built apparatus that Broomberg and Chanarin used to capture these portraits was originally designed to allow facial recognition in public spaces, intended for surveillance use. In conversation with Eyal Weizman, the artists explain:

What first sparked our interest when speaking with these engineers, was the technical challenge they faced in producing what they call ‘non-collaborative portraits’—where the subject is neither consensual nor necessarily aware of the camera. These portraits, essentially three-dimensional data maps rather than photographs *per se*, form a digital archive that can be rotated in space on a computer screen. [...] What we’re seeing is the negation of that humanity: the digital equivalent of a death mask. (ibid., p. 207)

The resulting images are stark, with partially formed faces floating against empty backgrounds, adding to the somewhat sinister feelings of distance and anonymity that contradict Sander’s consensual and camera-aware portraits. Broomberg and Chanarin’s images appear more like death masks than portraits, and the artists admit to being heavily influenced by Sander’s image of his own son Erich’s death mask, found at the end of the *People of the Twentieth Century* sequence, in the category named ‘Matter’, where it is one of three photographs of the dead (ibid., pp. 230-231). The supporting text for the project on the artists’ website<sup>9</sup> explains that they also reference a contemporary of Sander, German photographer Helmar Lerski, who, like Sander, categorized his subjects according to profession but his portraits (face only) are made up of a series of multiple viewpoints of the same subject.

Broomberg and Chanarin cite the Archive of Sir Benjamin Stone, now housed in the Library of Birmingham, as a further influence on the development of this work. This collection is, according to the artists, an accumulation of anthropological and ethnographic images that reflect Stone’s concerns ‘with notions of race, social Darwinism, physiognomy and phrenology, crudely dividing the world into deterministic categories’. They posit the power and ‘the ominous spectre of the archive’, with its rules and restrictions on visitor access, as a recurring theme. They also name Allan Sekula as a writer who explores the many operations of archival power in relation to the body, through his work on Sander and Bertillon (ibid., pp. 214-215, 233).

What is apparent is that these four artists are not only looking back to established and historical categorizations (within the natural sciences, for example) but are working with new taxonomies within contemporary science and technology. These are tied up with matters of institutionalized surveillance, and with weaponry and the functions and dysfunctions of

9 See <http://www.broombergchanarin.com/hometest/#/spirit/> [Accessed 4 November 2019]

military hardware. The pieces thereby construct a visible representation of the issues around the present-day archivization of the image, which takes the form of the largely unseen products of the machine vision of CCTV, drone footage and the like, as well as the scrapings of our own social media profiles, which are being 'archived' relentlessly for future use as you read.

## Works cited

- Banner, F. (2004). *All The World's Fighter Planes 2004*. London: Vanity Press.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press
- Benjamin, W. (1972). A Short History of Photography. *Screen*, 13, 5-26.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico.
- Broomberg, A., Chanarin, O. & Weizman, E. (2015). *The Bone Cannot Lie*. Text formed from a conversation between Eyal Weizman and Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin. Available at: <http://www.broombergchanarin.com/hometest/#/spirit/> [Accessed 5 April 2018]
- Burgin, V. (1986). *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Bury, S. (2005). Review of *All the World's Fighter Planes 2004*. *Art Monthly*, June 2005. Available at: <http://www.fionabanner.com/vanitypress/awfp2006/index.htm?i24> [Accessed 6 April 2018]
- Cook, T. (2001). Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts. *Archival Science*, 1, 3-24.
- Crimp, D. (1989). The Museum's Old / the Library's New. In R. Bolton (Ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (pp. 3-14). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Derrida, J. (1998). *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Döblin, A. (2003). *August Sander: Face of Our Time*. Munich: Schirmer Art Books.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Gagosian Gallery (2014). Press Release for the exhibition *Taryn Simon: Birds of the West Indies*, 7 February 2014. Available at: <https://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/taryn-simon--february-27-2014> [Accessed 4 April 2019]
- Gitelman, L. (2014). *Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Green, T. (2016). The August Sander Project: Beginning a Five-Year Exploration of Sander's 'People of the Twentieth Century'. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Available at: <https://stories.moma.org/the-august-sander-project-begin>

- ning-a-five-year-exploration-of-sanders-people-of-the-twentieth-a46e6db1ba44 [Accessed 10 January 2018]
- Gunning, T. (2004). What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs. *NORDICOM Review*, 5, 39-49.
- Henning, M. (2018). *Photography: the Unfettered Image*. London: Routledge.
- Hooke, R. (1780). *Microscopic Observations or Dr Hooke's Wonderful Discoveries by the Microscope*. London: Robert Wilkinson.
- Hudson, G. (2003). The Riddle of the Carte de Visite. *The Ephemera Society*. Available at: <http://www.ephemera-society.org.uk/articles/cartes.html> [Accessed 25 March 2018]
- Jäger, J. (2001). Photography: a Means of Surveillance? Judicial Photography, 1850 to 1900. *Crime, History & Societies* [Online], 5. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/1056> [Accessed 22 March 2018]
- Keller, C. (Ed.). (2008). *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-190*. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art / Yale University Press.
- Lister, M. (2007). A Sack in the Sand. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 13, 251-274.
- Magnani, G. (1990). Ordering Procedures: Photography in Recent German Art. *Arts Magazine*, 64, 78-83.
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2004). *August Sander: People of the Twentieth Century. A Photographic Portrait of Germany*. Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2004/august-sander-people-of-the-twentieth-century--a-photographic-portrait-of-germany>. [Accessed 28 March 2018]
- Obrist, H. U. (2010). Introduction. In T. Simon, *Contraband* (pp. 1-6). Göttingen: Steidl.
- Parikka, J. (2012). *What is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Parkes, K. (1989). In Memoriam: James Bond. *The Auk*, 106 (4), 718-720.
- Parkinson, J. (1640). *Theatrum botanicum: The Theatre of Plants, or An Herball of a Large Extent*. London: Thomas Cotes.
- Sander, A. (2003). *Face of Our Time: Sixty Portraits of Twentieth-Century Germans*. Munich: Schirmer Art Books.
- Seikaly, R. (n.d., c. 2013/14). Allan Sekula Against the Grain [Online]. SFC: San Francisco Camerawork. Available: <http://www.sfcamerawork.org/against-the-grain/> [Accessed 3 April 2018]
- Sekula, A. (1982). On the Invention of Photographic Meaning. In V. Burgin (Ed.), *Thinking Photograph* (pp. 84-109). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Sekula, A. (1984). *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks 1973-1983*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: The press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.
- Sekula, A. (1986). The Body and the Archive. *October*, 39, 3-64.
- Sekula, A. (2003). Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital. In L. Wells (Ed.), *The Photography Reader* (pp. 443-452). London: Routledge.

- Simon, T. (2013). *Birds of the West Indies*. Ostildern: Hatje Cantz.
- Simon, T. (2016). *Field Guide to Birds of the West Indies*. Ostildern: Hatje Cantz.
- Spens, M. (2010). Fiona Banner: Harrier and Jaguar, Moving Installation Art Fast Forward. *Studio International* [Online], 07 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/fiona-banner-harrier-and-jaguar-moving-installation-art-fast-forward> [Accessed 5 April 2018]
- Stalnaker, J. (2016). Description and the Nonhuman View of Nature. *Representations*, vol. 135, no. 1 (Summer 2016). Special issue: Description Across Disciplines, 72-88.
- Talbot, H.F. (1844) [2010, Ebook 33447]. *The Pencil of Nature*. Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33447> [Accessed 27 March 2018]
- Wall, J. (1995). 'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art. In A. Goldsteinn & A. Rorimer (Eds.), *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1995* (pp. 246-247). Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

## 2 The social archive

### Abstract

Popular photography and the language around it are scrutinized through a discussion of early family albums, whose viewing requires an unscripted narration. Next, the home slideshow (also requiring voice-over) is positioned as a bridge between album and home movie, with the slide carousel as a device for archiving. Vilèm Flusser's anxieties around the addiction to photography in the early 1980s are taken forward to our social media milieu and there is an examination of the way that we archive our own material, with scrutiny of the efficacy of the tag as descriptor. Human description is pitted against machine description, whilst acknowledging that machine learning for image description is based upon datasets that are built on human digital labour schemes.

**Keywords:** digital labour; narration; photo album; slideshow; social media; tagging

Through an examination of personal 'archiving' practices, we can address themes of original order, seriality and the relationships between image groups, all in relation to the methodologies of the archive institution. What is apparent is that these image sets inevitably bring language with them, whether through text or spoken word in the case of the photo album and the slideshow, or through the short form of the tag inside network culture. In the case of the tag, social and institutional networks are growing ever closer in terms of their organizational techniques, applied in the context of the mass of photographic material put online inside both milieux.

Today, much of the organization and viewing of photographs in the social sphere—usually within social media—centres on vernacular images, consumer snapshots of the everyday. Conversely, the earliest photo albums were put together before the arrival of the Kodak Brownie in 1900 and the rise of snapshot photography, and so they were mainly made up of formal studio portraits. The Brownie took photography out of the hands of the

---

Birkin, J., *Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2021

DOI: 10.5117/9789463729642\_CH02

professionals and allowed ordinary people to take and to share photographs of specific events in their lives. Vilém Flusser has little time for the snapshot, which he conflates with the rise and the commercialism of the automatic camera in the latter half of the twentieth century, in turn leading to the de-skilling of the photographer—and to too many images being made, a condition that he terms a ‘photo-mania’. He identifies his main problem with the snapshot: ‘anyone who takes snapshots does not necessarily have to be able to decode photographs’ and argues that snapshot photographers misguidedly think of their images as ‘automatic reflections of the world’ that require no further thought (2000 [1983], pp. 57-58).

The motivation for recording our lives through photography remains by and large the same in the digital age, and snapshot images continue to be understood through their organization, in an album, box or networked container; and through their function as an *aide memoire*, supplemented by communal viewing and accompanying commentary. The camera phone and its ever-available links to the networked spaces of social media ensures that we receive these images quickly, by hand-held devices that are always with us and by popular applications that are designed to bring text and image together, and consequently to bring images together. The ‘decoding’ takes place this time within an ever-changing and itinerant mass of text and image updates.

## From formal album to casual snapshot

The photograph album has existed as social tool and organizational device for photographic prints since the mid-nineteenth century. In her essay ‘Talking through the “Fotygraft Album”’, Elizabeth Siegel highlights the dual purpose of the photo album as being, ‘first, to construct a visual and historical past for ourselves, a narrative of identity cemented by its retelling; second, to entertain others and explain to them who we are’. (p. 241) Before the introduction of dedicated albums, the family Bible, containing family trees and other written entries, was supplemented with studio portraits of family, friends, and even public figures of the time; but it remained a predominantly text-based object. As Siegel argues, it ‘combines photographic documentation with a near-obsessive practice of textual record’. (p. 244)

The images in early *carte de visite* albums, in common with those in family Bibles that came before them and cabinet card albums that came after them, were formal photographs that did not provide family narratives



Figure 2.1 *Carte de Visite* by Oliver François Xavier Sarony (1860s), albumen silver print. Recto showing George Henry Broughton, verso showing the photographer's mark. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Albert Ten Eyck Gardner Collection).

or any real clue as to the character of the sitter (Figure 2.1). It is these early collections, from the 1860s through the 1880s, that Siegel sees as part of a transitional and neglected moment in the history of the photo album, a history which has a tendency to cover only 'post-Kodak', that is, post-1900, albums (p. 241), although cabinet card albums continued into the twentieth century. The construction of *carte de visite* albums became an immensely popular pastime in the 1860s. The posed studio shots would find their way into mass-produced albums, made with special spaces to slot in the cards. Unlike the family Bible, there was limited space for text to accompany the images and the narrative would be told and re-told in various ways each time the album was brought out. As Siegel explains, there was scant information on which to base the conversation:

Unlike their counterparts of the post-Kodak era, nineteenth-century albums contained individual studio portraits instead of personal snapshots of group *events* [...] the portrait had to represent not a moment of a person's life, but the *person herself*. [...] The narrative contained in or



suggested by a nineteenth-century family photograph album had to fill in substantial blanks about the lives and personalities of the people pictured there, weaving portraits of individuals into a story.

Siegel continues: 'Once assembled together in an album, photographs seemed to take the form of a narrative by the sheer fact of them being sequential.' (pp. 246-248 [original italics]) Here, and for future reference, 'narrative' needs to be defined and differentiated from 'story'—these words are often are often perceived and used as interchangeable, but they are critically different in the context of the archive and how incomplete evidence is used. Marie-Laure Ryan defines 'story' as 'event or sequence of events' that make up an action (p. 344). This would not apply to the *carte de visite* album, as there is no sequence of events provided by the photographs. A 'narrative', on the other hand, she defines as involving a discourse: 'an ability to evoke stories in the mind'. (p. 347) This is precisely what is happening in the case of the early albums of formal photographs, and it is this that is most problematic in terms of the archive, as it involves creating a discourse that lies outside the information contained in the images, one that is subject to the complexities of human imagination and interpretation.

Archivists are generally not drawn to oral histories because of their unreliability, based on the fallibility of the human memory itself and the tendency to over-personalize; they prefer instead the solidity and the stasis of the written document. Yet the *carte de visite* album undoubtedly has archival qualities—it exists as a self-contained photographic record—and many of the cards and albums exist as archive objects. But without any commentary they are de-personalized affairs, and, as Siegel suggests, each one is almost undistinguishable from the next (p. 247).

With the popularity of the snapshot camera, family events were captured in sequence and albums developed into more effective storytelling devices, with images usually based around special occasions. With the temporal sequence of images of specific events tied down in an album, there was less room and less need for imagination; the images themselves describe the event and little commentary is needed. The photograph albums of Louis Mountbatten and his family, held in the Special Collections Division in the University of Southampton Library, demonstrate this in an extraordinary way. As well as formal albums covering state visits (Lord Louis Mountbatten held high office in the Navy, before being appointed Viceroy of India in 1947), there are personal albums covering family holidays to distant locations, where their somewhat hedonistic 1930s lifestyle was recorded in detail (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). Mountbatten was born Prince Louis of Battenburg and

was a cousin of Queen Elizabeth II; his wife Edwina came from a family of Earls and financiers. This aristocratic family would therefore not have had any concerns over the high cost of film and processing, and these albums are fascinating because of the sheer number of images that were taken. Instead of the one or two shots of a holiday or a specific event that would be found in most albums of the time, here there are many. This is a manifestation of their extravagant lifestyle not simply through what is recorded, but through the quantity of photographs made. Even in 1963, in a sample of ordinary Parisians, Pierre Bourdieu found that there was a very low consumption of film, with a third using less than two rolls a year, and the rest less than six. He describes this occasional practice as 'dependent on traditional occasions, family festivities and holidays; it most generally makes do with the most rudimentary cameras (box cameras) and the least expensive materials (black and white)'. (pp. 176-177)

The Mountbatten albums are impeccably organized. Page titles and captions give names, places and dates of capture, along with some snippets of personal information, sometimes even using 'pet' names for people. One of the reasons for this meticulous organization is that aristocratic women such as Edwina Mountbatten were relieved of household chores that dogged the working class women of the time and would have ample time for the organization of their photographs, or would even have someone to organize their albums for them; this is lucky for us, as we are provided with a comprehensive record of organized and annotated progressions. Rather than being impossible to decode (Flusser, 2000 [1983], pp. 57-58), these snapshot images are understood through their specific position in the album and through their short captions: image time, context and meaning unfold as the pages are turned.

Film, processing and printing became more affordable as the second half of the twentieth century progressed, and ordinary families became more prolific in their image making—hence Flusser's term 'photo-mania' (ibid.). The photographs were not always stuck in albums but might instead accumulate, presenting an opportunity for a retrospective arrangement outside of a strict chronological order, by accident or by intention, as photographs are pulled out of order to tell different stories. The reordering of photographs for personal use demonstrates how the archival concept of 'original order' comes into play. When a collection passes from a person or an organization into the archive, the order in which it has been left is preserved (there is more on the history and workings of original order in the next chapter). Outside of the archival framework, 'original order' is of course a misnomer, as the original order for analogue photographic images is the order in which they are shot. Since the introduction of roll film with its numbered frames



Figure 2.2 Mountbatten Album, MB2-L7, page 62, 'Acrobatics!! Malta, Summer 1932'.  
Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.

in the 1880s (first on paper, then on plastic), it has been possible for us to reconstruct the order of shooting.

Allan Sekula describes the different kinds of order found in archives, and projects the methodologies used by archivists into the domestic setting:

Normal orders are either taxonomic or diachronic (sequential); in most archives both are used, but at different, alternating levels of organization. Taxonomic orders might be based on sponsorship, authorship, genre, technique, iconography, subject matter, and so on, depending on the range of the archive. Diachronic order follows an order of production or acquisition. Anyone who has ever sorted or simply sifted through a box of family snapshots understands the dilemma (and perhaps the



E!



E!

Shino



E!

Figure 2.3 Mountbatten Album, MB2-L7, page 63, 'Acrobatics!! Malta, Summer 1932'. Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.

folly) inherent in these procedures. One is torn between narration and categorization, between chronology and inventory. (2003, p. 446)

Collections of images that have previously been carefully categorized by type can enter the archive and be maintained as such. Technically speaking, collections—of all kinds, not just photographic—are different from archives exactly because they have not grown in an organic and developmental way, but have been consciously gathered together and are dependent on the whims and tastes of the collector; collections often tell us more about the mindset of the collector than about the objects themselves. The preservation of original order—taxonomic, chronological, or a combination of both—is

of great importance to the user of the archive, as it provides a critical and unwritten commentary on the actions and the thinking of the original owner.

## Meditations, recollections, speculations

In order to reflect further on the organization of our images, and in particular on the kind of commentary that we attach to them, I want to examine Sekula's photo-text installation *Mediations on a Triptych* (1973-1978). Sekula worked with his own family photos in this piece, which takes the form of a detailed written exploration of three displayed vernacular images. The work originated as a gallery installation consisting of three 'type C' photographs, a booklet containing the text, a reading desk and a chair. It is owned by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and by Art Gallery New South Wales in Sydney<sup>1</sup>, and the photographs and the text are reproduced in Sekula's exhibition publication from 1984, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973—1983*.<sup>2</sup> (All the quotes that I use from Sekula's *Meditations* text are taken from that book, page range 168-174.) In the original installation snapshots are pulled out of their usual milieu and into a different space, that of the gallery; these very ordinary family photographs are given presence by virtue of being large prints (each 27 x 26 centimetres), mounted, framed and attached to a gallery wall. Printed in the book, they are small, taking them back to their snapshot origins. In his text, Sekula acknowledges the ability of everyday snapshots like these to preserve a particular time and place: 'Something is being memorialized. An artefact is provided for future commemoration.' He posits the first image as appearing 'in an almost archeological light'.

The *Meditations* text is divided into four parts, one relating to each image and the fourth to the whole set. It is a detailed piece of writing, more than 4000 words in total; it is a lengthy piece of observation, recollection, speculation and contemplation. The text mirrors and amplifies the mode of commentary that might have been used when talking through early photo albums, as it puts forward wide-ranging ideas and deviations that have only tenuous links to the images themselves. These three images

1 The *Mediations on a Triptych* installation and photographs can be viewed on the Art Gallery New South Wales website at <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/108.2012.a-d/> [Accessed 8 November 2019]

2 *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983* has now been republished by Mack in its original form. It contains many of Sekula's seminal essays (including 'The Body and the Archive') and photographic projects.

could be termed unremarkable: they are family photographs taken against three modest backdrops. They do not give us much of a clue as to the real story, if there is one at all. The text itself is one that is far removed from the neutral descriptive text of the archive, yet it touches on aspects of the archive in a number of ways. *Meditations* is a piece that I have worked with extensively in my own art practice, with film and lecture performance pieces identifying and repositioning the various archival elements that surface in the text.

The familiar subject of these three photographs is the family, and they are set within what Bourdieu (p. 34) terms 'the space of life, which [...] excludes alienation, that attenuated disorientation that leads to the act of looking'. Sekula often photographed people in their personal space, such as their home or place of work; resulting in exquisitely produced black and white photographs, specifically to invite close reading in an exhibition or a publication. Here in *Meditations on a Triptych* he is providing the substantial text exactly to invite us to look at the space of life, to look more closely at the familiar in the raw form of the snapshot. Like most family photographs, these could be part of what Bourdieu calls 'a *technology for the reiteration of the party* [...] Ritually associated with festivities, family ceremonies or social gatherings' (p 27, [original italics]), images that record happy occasions, celebrations and events. But in the *Meditations* images, although the costumes are elaborate and we are told that the photographs are taken around the Easter celebrations of the Catholic Church, the setting is far from fancy, and the dismal backdrops are described in detail in Sekula's text: 'The garages look a bit squalid and the woman has varicosed legs.' and, 'The three figures face the camera in front of a narrow strip of shabby grass.'

As well as the imperfect setting, the imperfect aesthetic of the snapshot is recognized in the text: 'The camera has been tilted at an angle such that the image has the appearance of running downhill to the left.' The thinking behind the organization of the photographs is revealed, as the first photograph is positioned as a reject, unfit to be included in the family album or collection: 'The man appears to be standing on the photographer's head. Because of this flaw, this photograph is valued less than others taken on the same day. The picture remains in the processing envelope.' These are photographs of Sekula's own parents and siblings, dressed up for a family event that took place in 1966 or 1967, according to his text. Yet we are not told in the text that it is his family; nor are we told that a younger Sekula is the photographer of the triptych. This is now accepted, and it is corroborated by the fact that he is missing from the family group in each

case, except obliquely in the first photo: 'The shadow of a head falls on the scene, obscuring the tip of the man's right shoe. This negative trace points back to the photographer, who stands, as usual, outside the frame.'

The whole *Meditations* text is written from a perspective of unfamiliarity that is common in archival description, resulting in a detached and unsentimental use of language. As Sekula explains at the beginning: 'I want to give what was once familiar an exemplary strangeness.' Sekula writes of his parents in the first image: 'She stands with her feet together. She smiles slightly. Her eyes are closed against the light. Although no space is visible between the blue right border of the man and the red left border of the woman, it is likely that their bodies are not touching.' Here the language use is consistent with the objectivity of visual content-based description that takes place in the archive, documenting what can be seen and using specific language—such as 'it is likely'—to record information that has a basis in the visual but is more uncertain. This is a mode that Sekula uses in his descriptions of the Lewis Hine and Alfred Stieglitz photographs of immigrants to America—detailed in Chapter 1—disregarding context, describing them in a neutral way (1982, p. 88).

The narratives that Sekula provides in the *Meditations* text—and they *are* narratives, as defined by Ryan and cited above, are repeatedly paused and interrupted by his frequent returns to the image via unambiguous descriptions of visual elements: 'The woman is wearing a red dress. Her mouth is painted with the same red.' The visual content therefore occupies a critical place in the structure of the text, often acting as a jumping-off point for the transportation of the reader to a place outside of the image itself—and also as a device for bringing them back:

The monument in the foreground has an octagonal base and a fluted pedestal. This is WPA architecture. This is art deco as it revolutionized the public buildings of America. This is an example of monopoly capital saving its own skin through the agency of the state. This is a high school built in 1938 in a working-class community. The man's head obscures the lower left of the bas-relief.

The description of visual content is also a way of connecting the three images, of emphasizing their intrinsic associations with each other. He compares the second image to the first: 'She sits as demurely as she stood in the first photograph. [...] She is wearing the same red dress as before but now instead of a mantilla she wears a black toreador hat.' The second and third images are similarly connected:

We wonder how the same sky was moments before so intensely saturated with color could be so washed out. We can discern a flagpole projecting upward from behind the wall. We could imagine that this pole is anchored in the monument we have already confronted. Comparing the angle of the sunlight in both images we determine that the three females are facing north.

Now Sekula is playing the part of the researcher, making connections and deductions from information provided by the three images, reinforcing the importance of order and seriality, and highlighting the fact that one image alone is insufficient.

The intervention of pockets of description in this wide-ranging text is also significant because it is what we all do: we describe, or at least we pepper our words with description, even if the thing we are describing is laid out before us. Sharon Marcus et al argue that we need to examine the poor reputation of description, especially in academia, where the belief exists that 'it is insufficiently critical or even tautological, because it simply repeats what anyone can see or hear'. (p. 4) It is clear that description is an important operational and plot-building device that can exist within many different kinds of texts and these aspects will be discussed in more detail later in this book. However, in social situations, such as talking through our family snapshots, there is no anxiety whatsoever over repetition between the visual and the textual; description is a rhetorical act that reinforces the speaker's familiarity with the images and affords better audience engagement with them.

## The spectacle of the slideshow

As a relatively hi-tech alternative to the photo album, the sharing of personal images through the projection of 35mm slides in the home was a popular social activity in the second half of the twentieth century. It soon became the focus of jokes around the expectation of a long and wearisome evening to be spent looking at someone else's pictures; after going to the bother of converting the living room into a temporary projection space it was tempting to keep the show going for as long as possible. The projection of slides in the home coincided with the rise of holidays in more exotic locations, and with the growing popularity of the dinner party. These conditions combined to produce a show and an audience, with holiday highlights presented in order to impress family, friends and even work colleagues. Equally, it was a



presentation of the ownership of costly state-of-the-art equipment and of the operator's technical know-how. Bourdieu (p. 63) argues that true lovers of photography—his camera club demographic—saw the rise of colour photography (and subsequently home movies) as 'naively ostentatious technologies'. He discovered from this study group that these technologies were most popular amongst 'shopkeepers and craftsmen'. Similarly, the home slideshow was predominantly a lower-middle class (by UK standards) preoccupation. Advertisements for slide and film projectors of the time also position it as a male-dominated family activity. The man would choose and operate the camera and the projection equipment; the woman would usually be assigned first to the role of model in the photographs and then to that of hostess at the screening.

At a time before widescreen TV and digital projection, this screen-based activity allowed the novel sharing and viewing of large-scale images outside of a cinema setting. The slides, measuring a neat 50mm square including mounts, could be stored away in the small box that they arrived in from the lab, yet these analogue images could be projected to fill a domestic space, without any significant loss of quality. The size of projection gave the humble snapshot an air of spectacle; the viewers would feel that they were immersed in the image, rather than peering at its surface from above, as they did with the photo album. Tina Weidner places the projection of still images in a trajectory with the projection of movies: 'The 35 mm slide transparency is a hybrid medium that belongs on a continuum between still photography and motion-picture film and combines qualities of both technologies.' (n.p.)

Even if the intimacy of touching, smelling and leafing through an album was lost, the slideshow, sitting in this space between the album and the home movie, continued to provide a structure for talking around images. Although live commentary and conversation was also possible with early home movies, mostly shot in Super 8 format and without audio recording, films create viewing conditions less favourable to verbal exchange, as the audience is kept busy converting the rapid streaming of frames and the perception of movement into some kind of narrative. Friedrich Kittler posits the intense activity of viewing film as 'a psychological experiment under conditions of everyday reality that uncovers unconscious processes of the central nervous system'. (p. 161)

Photograph albums can be flipped through, backwards and forwards, paused over and studied like any book, but they are static objects, filled up from front to back, usually in a chronological progression. Slides, on the other hand, can be reordered at any time and selections for projection edited up

or down: a different show for a different audience. Here the slideshow also differs from the fixed temporality of the home movie, usually an unedited chronological progression. This is a practice that is interestingly maintained today by 'straight8ers', a committed collective of short filmmakers who follow the rule 'one super 8 cartridge no editing'.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1902 and 1937, psychic investigator Harry Price delivered various talks about his experiments, which he illustrated with glass lantern slides, and his lecture slides have already been encountered in the previous chapter. Many of the sets of slides that he put together for his talks remain intact in the Senate House Library, University of London, and are comprehensively listed.<sup>4</sup> As the catalogue states: 'The glass lantern slides were kept by Price in numbered drawers in a wooden cabinet and have been kept in it. Furthermore, the original numbers assigned to the slides by Price have been maintained.' Some of Price's glass lantern slide sets are large; for example, his lecture on 'Haunted Sussex' has 134 slides. The list for the 'flower medium' slideshow, on the other hand, is strikingly compact:

**HPG/2/199-202      Hilda Lewis      n.d**

Glass lantern slides used by Harry Price for illustrated talks featuring British psychic medium Hilda Lewis (the 'flower medium'), including the following:

- 199. Roses bulging under coatee
  - 200. Roses appearing from under coatee
  - 201. Roses on lap
  - 202. Her confession of fraud
- (4 items)

This sweet set of four slides is all that is needed to tell Hilda Lewis' story, and we gain a complete understanding of the event from the catalogue descriptions alone. The audiences of the lengthy home slideshows would likely have appreciated such efficiency of visual storytelling.

3 'Straight 8' is a competition-based enterprise, which presents its challenge thus: 'make a short film on one cartridge of super 8mm cine film with no editing, no re-takes, no grade, no post-production. The visuals for your film are completed in-camera, shooting in story order, editing only with each pull of the camera's trigger.' You can find more information and examples of the work of 'straight8ers' at <http://www.straight8.net> [Accessed 8 November 2019]

4 The Harry Price catalogue is available through University of London Archives and Manuscripts at <https://archives.libraries.london.ac.uk/Details/archive/110007211> [Accessed 8 November 2019]

The strapline used in the ad for the Kodak Cavalcade 520 projector<sup>5</sup> introduced in the late 1950s was that it ‘changes slides all by itself’, so the whole experience became automated in terms of time spent looking at and speaking to each image, compared to the less structured viewing times of an album or early slide show. Kodak’s Carousel Projector, launched in 1961, similarly offered automation, but its 80 slides could also be moved backwards and forwards by remote control, allowing for preferred and varying viewing and talking times. The Don Draper character in Season I episode 13 of *Mad Men*, entitled ‘The Wheel’ (first aired on 18 October 2007), bases his very personal selling pitch of the Carousel Projector not on company use but firmly on family and nostalgia: ‘it’s a time machine ... goes backwards, forwards, takes us to a place where we ache to go again’, taking us back to the flipping through of the photo album. Aside from the memories and the nostalgia evoked by viewing images from one’s past, as experienced by Draper, old forms of photographic media themselves are commonly imagined and revered as nostalgic objects and tied to popular notions of the archive. Kodachrome slides in particular are appreciated for their distinct palette of saturated colours, now reproducible in popular smartphone applications.

Draper’s whole pitch for his Carousel ad is in response to a comment from the room about the wheel-like carousel (Figure 2.4) that sits on top of the projector and holds the slides; the opinion expressed is that ‘wheels aren’t seen as exciting technology’. Wheels are of course still commonplace today in terms of bicycles and cars, but the cogs and wheels that were once central to many complex mechanical operations have now been replaced by microchip technology. In 1999, Flusser mourned the ‘slow but irreversible disappearance of wheels. They no longer tick away inside electronic equipment.’ (1999, p.117) In the case of the slide projector, the technology moved from the slide tray to the wheel, and the ontological differences between a fully rotating and repeating wheel of images and a small rectangular tray of slides with a defined end point are great. The tray, like the album, has a beginning and an end; in terms of a period of viewing and a period of recorded history, its temporality is limited and defined. Conversely, a carousel projector can run interrupted for hours on end, in a gallery setting, for example. The practice of leaving one or more blank spaces in the carousel to signify beginnings and ends of sequences was developed to attempt to impose a linear instead of a circular temporal structure—Flusser acknowledges that there have

5 For a full timeline of Kodak projectors, from 1947 to 2004, a PDF is available for download at <http://resources.kodak.com/support/pdf/en/manuals/slideProj/history.pdf>. [Accessed 8 November 2019]



Figure 2.4 Carousel of slides for the Kodak Carousel Projector.  
Author's own photograph.

always been those 'who have attempted to rebel against the circling wheel of fate'. (ibid., p. 119)

In common with the continuous showing of a film in an art gallery today, or in the picture houses of the 1950s and 60s, one can effectively begin and end an automated slideshow anywhere at all, the *this is where we came in* moment that supports Flusser's 'eternal order of the circle' (ibid., p. 118), which he sees as a mechanism that allows time to 'return people and things to the position allotted to them'. Famously, Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960) barred the then commonplace practice of entering the cinema part way through the screening: the film was marketed on a poster produced by Paramount Pictures with the line 'It is required that you see PSYCHO from the very beginning', confirming that the habit of joining midway was still common then. The showings of *Psycho* were carefully regulated and latecomers were turned away at the door.<sup>6</sup> This intervention was supposed to be for reasons of plot preservation, but it was most likely also a pragmatic decision on the part of Paramount in order to prevent the

6 See 'Alfred Hitchcock's Rules for Watching *Psycho* (1960)' at [http://www.openculture.com/2012/07/alfred\\_hitchcocks\\_rules\\_for\\_watching\\_ipsychoi.html](http://www.openculture.com/2012/07/alfred_hitchcocks_rules_for_watching_ipsychoi.html) [Accessed 8 November 2019]

audience complaining and walking out because they thought the popular film star Janet Leigh did not after all feature in the film. She was famously and violently killed off early on.

The Kodak Carousel Projector has become an iconic and nostalgic object itself, hence its stylish appearance in *Mad Men*. It also formed the backbone of lectures in the art school, with institutions holding large slide collections and slides recognized as the best quality and most stable way to document artworks and to present them in a lecture situation. Robert S. Nelson argues, 'For a bit more than a century, teaching and lecturing about art has relied on photographic slides' and he adds, 'but what is commonplace today is about to be digitalized into oblivion.' (p. 414) This is a topic of conversation that I am familiar with, as I worked as a slide curator in a London art school in the 1980s and witnessed first-hand the attempt to supplant slides with new technologies such as the LaserDisc. Measuring 30 centimetres in diameter, this was a clunky precursor to the CD that would never be viable as a replacement for slides in an art school setting, where image quality and flexibility was a necessity. Lecturers frequently made and preserved their own image archives: slides were loaded up in carousels in a particular order and stacked up for the next time the lecture was to be delivered. Small changes to this 'archive' were easy to make.

Nelson goes as far to say that the slide lecture has had 'a profound impact on art history', with many of us subjected to this form of teaching as we passed through higher education in the arts. He sees the slide lecture primarily as an 'oral practice', a 'performative triangle consisting of speaker, audience and image', where the images never remain as simple projections but 'they create narratives and social bonds' (pp. 414-415). Nelson distinguishes the slide lecture from the home slideshow, where 'amateur speaker meets amateur audience'. However, as he concedes, there is a commonality between the two situations, as the 'parenthetical remarks establish the speaker as a direct witness, someone who has been there and returned to tell about it'. (pp. 420-421) In reality, this often applies more to the home slideshow of personally recorded events than to the art historical lecture, where the lecturers themselves have perhaps only ever seen the artworks in books or in slide form. But the rhetoric is the same, the remarks of the lecturer take on a personal and knowing slant that goes back as far as the early *carte de visite* and cabinet card albums, where the person talking through the album was not a witness to the photographic moment either.

Nelson compares the change in technology, from slide to digital, to other evolutions of technologies, such as 'roll to codex, manuscript to printed book, or manual typewriter to computer keyboard'. He argues that there

was a time of indecision in all these transitions; an uncertainty about which technology was to prevail; and that 'prior customs often continue, even as they cease to be understood'. (p. 415) Hence, the PowerPoint 'slideshow' format persists; it is a direct descendant of the 35mm slideshow that many PowerPoint users have never experienced. The slide projector is now much appreciated by artists for its whirr and click as the cogs turn and the slide moves on—not in the context of the lecture, but as part of their post-digital art practice.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the slide and the technology of projection is understood by this small group of users and their audience as a corrective to newer media solutions for showing images—those digital technologies and slideshow software packages, such as PowerPoint, that move images on seamlessly (or fancily). The analogue projection of slides is not a seamless transaction at all; slides do not 'slide' from one image to another, as Weidner (n.p.) suggests. Instead they click, or even stutter; as Flusser explains: 'Clicking is more easily mechanized than sliding. This becomes clear when cars and film projectors start to go wrong.' (1999, p. 62) And, as we might have anticipated, PowerPoint has now become so ubiquitous—and in many ways dated—that it too has attracted the critical and playful attention of artists.

Roland Barthes also mourns the loss the mechanical, with its security of pace and its fixed temporal structure, 'the metallic shifting of the plates (when the camera still has such things). I love these mechanical sounds [...] I love bells, clocks, watches—and I recall that at first photographic implements were related to techniques of cabinetmaking and the machinery of precision: cameras, in short, were clocks for seeing.' (1981, p. 15) Viewed from above, the carousel itself shows a marked resemblance to a clock face, with each slide slot having its own number embossed on the outside section of the moving wheel (Figure 2.5). Slides may interact with each other and tell a story—as is clearly demonstrated in the Harry Price 'Hilda Lewis' catalogue list reproduced above—but through their projection, and the click that separates them, they are presented as discrete, delineated and enumerated objects—and Flusser links clicking itself to numbers, to acts of calculation and counting (1999, p. 63). As a simple indexing device that defines the place of each slide, the carousel numbering system parallels the system of enumeration that runs across all archive materials: documents, files, boxes, shelves, bays and strongrooms are all individually numbered.

7 Also of interest might be the film *The Last Slide Projector* (2007, dir. Paige Sarlin), which looks at the Kodak Carousel projector at the end production run, investigating issues technological change and the implications of the transition from analogue to digital.



Figure 2.5 Numbering system on the carousel.  
Author's own photograph.

## We are all miniarchivists now!

Photography today is cheap and user-friendly, from capture through to storage. However, as we have only recently begun to accept, the environmental cost of both capture and storage is high, due to the planned obsolescence of smart-phones, which have an average life of only two years (Belkhir and Elmeligi, p. 454), together with energy-heavy data storage facilities. Nonetheless, the smartphone, with its sophisticated yet fully automatic camera, has become an everyday extension of our personalities and of our bodies. Sean Cubitt examines both analogue and digital processes alike, through notions of automation: he sees automation not as a matter confined to the digital, but as an important concept in the development of photography, through the dry-plate process, the Box camera, the Instamatic, and 1970s electronic cameras (pp. 3-5).

As part of his criticism of the snapshot image, Flusser highlights the addictive nature of the camera in the 1980s and links this to notions of automation:

the automaticity of the camera intoxicates them [...] Cameras demand that their owners (the ones that are hooked on them) keep on taking snaps, that they produce more and more redundant images. This photo-mania involving the eternal recurrence of the same (or of something very similar)

leads eventually to the point where people taking snaps feel that they have gone blind: Drug dependency takes over. People taking snaps can now only see the world through the camera and in photographic categories. They are not 'in charge of' taking photographs, they are consumed by the greed of their camera, they have become an extension to the button of their camera. Their actions are automatic camera functions.

Flusser argues that high-volume image production, afforded by cameras that are increasingly complex in terms of their build yet becoming more and more simple to use, results in a 'permanent flow of unconsciously created images' that constitutes a 'camera memory', one that is created by the apparatus rather than by the person operating it (2000 [1983], pp. 57-58). In making this argument, he is not against technological development *per se*, as Hubertus von Axelman explains in his afterword to *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. Rather, Flusser criticizes certain technologies, such as automatic cameras, because they reduce the need for human thought and replace it with actions that benefit the 'interests of social power' (*ibid.*, p. 92). This is now a topic of widespread concern, as it has become apparent that social media companies, as well as the makers of smart phones and apps, are the real beneficiaries of our heavy camera use and social interaction.

From the point of view of the user, the permanent flow of images is now a familiar thing, as many tend to be in a perpetual state, not only of unconscious image making, but also of uploading for others to see. Today, we are generally not so fearful for the state of the images produced, but for the effects of the heavy use of smartphones on the operator. Flusser's mention of dependency inevitably brings us to the topic of addiction to phones and social networking, which is now a subject of serious debate, with various strategies put forward for kicking the habit, especially amongst a demographic of increasingly connected teens and young adults.

Like Flusser some thirty years before, Andreas Müller-Pohle sees availability of technology and ease of use as the reason why personal photographic practices have proliferated (p. 3). There are recent rebuttals to this view: arguments that devices are designed to satisfy a need, that it is the broader societal conditions—especially the requirement by big tech companies for data and quantification—that necessitates the technology.<sup>8</sup> It is entirely

8 For example, see James Edward Draney's article 'It's the iPhones isn't it?' at Public Books (online) at <http://www.publicbooks.org/its-the-iphones-isnt-it/> [Accessed 8 November 2019] This article bases its discussion around philosopher Barbara Cassin's book, *Google Me: One-Click Democracy*, written in 2007 but newly translated from the original French.



in the interests of Google, for example, that we take more images; that the ease of use and the capacity of our smartphones and our apps do not limit us. Jussi Parikka proposes that it is the new world of near-limitless storage that is impacting on us as users, with cloud and mobile storage companies reaping the benefits, as well as the 'free' social media platforms that mine our data for their own gain. Parikka also draws our attention to the way that much of our interaction online draws on archival terminology, with 'archive' replacing 'delete' in our email programmes for example. This is a metaphorical use of the word 'archive', of course, and there is more about the significance of this and other metaphors that draw on the language of the archive in the final chapter of this book. Parikka continues: 'We are miniarchivists ourselves in this information society, which could be more aptly called an information management society.' Thus, he emphasizes the management activities of the archive—ordering, storing, labelling—that are intrinsic to our social media interactions (2013, pp. 1-2).

In 2007, the Musée de L'Elysee in Lausanne, Switzerland organized an exhibition entitled *'We Are All Photographers Now!'* pitching itself as 'the first major museum project to undertake a comprehensive overview of the digital revolution as it impacts on everyone'. The organizers asked the following question: 'During photography's entire history, the amateur and the professional have represented distinct and often contrary approaches to photography, each battling for supremacy. Has the digital revolution tilted the field of battle irrevocably in the amateur's favour?'<sup>9</sup> Members of the public were invited to submit images online, and a selection was then chosen randomly by computer. As Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis explain in their article 'A Life More Photographic', the exhibition 'responded to the way in which the photography of "ordinary people" has achieved visibility and popularity, challenging the way in which photography is framed and consumed'. (p.10) The title of the exhibition has been many times repeated in the context of the proliferation of everyday images and of citizen journalism, and it is a robust and popular rebuttal to the various claims made that photography is dead. Whilst not all of us would choose to identify ourselves as photographers, most of us are able to take a decent photograph, and photography now reaches across all aspects of daily life. Statistics for 2019 from social media blogger Dustin Stout show that approximately 300 million photos were being uploaded

9 The main website for this exhibition has now gone offline, but some information, including several interesting external links, is available on the exhibition blog at <https://allphotographers.wordpress.com/about-the-project/> [Accessed 8 November 2019]

daily to Facebook, and 95 million to Instagram.<sup>10</sup> The numbers are perhaps articulated in a way that we can more easily process by Orit Gat, writing for *Frieze*: ‘Every two minutes, people upload more images to the internet than existed in total just 150 years ago.’ (2019, n.p.) Rather than the mindboggling statistics we find on sites such as Stout’s, Gat’s explanation provides a historical perspective that is pertinent to the discourse on the expansion of photography.

The act of making and subsequent dissemination of images has become a routine activity, and routine activities become automatic and remote by definition. Blake Stimson’s phrase ‘an image factory in every pocket or handbag’ neatly identifies the automation of popular digital photography and its role as a production-line activity, one where aesthetic consideration is often perceived as secondary to ‘the sociopolitical register of multiplicity’ (p. 41). The image factory offers both inbound and outbound logistics: production line is followed by distribution service. The most important factor in the digital photography revolution by far, and critical to the continuing socialization of the vernacular image, is the fast distribution of photographs via smartphone apps. Images are seamlessly moved to and across social media platforms and shared via text message or email. Whereas vernacular photographs were once created for ‘exchange of family information’ (Bourdieu, p. 22), they can now be disseminated to an audience of family, friends, or strangers—not even with anything as positive as a click, but with a gentle touch of the finger. Early on, in response to the phase of image proliferation that was to prompt Flusser’s anxiety, Barthes (1981, p. 15) identified the responsible body part: ‘the Photographer’s organ is not his eye [...] but his finger’.

The Leica first emerged in 1925, and, as Michelle Henning argues, because it had a viewfinder that was held up to the eye, rather than a viewfinder at waist-level, it ‘facilitated a new kind of mobility and a new kind of integration of camera and body’. (p. 138) Walter Benjamin was aware that as the camera became more portable and user-friendly the nature of the images that came out of it would be different to those produced by unwieldy plate and box cameras—and they would need outside clarification (see Chapter 1, in relation to the photo caption). He argues:

The camera becomes smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture transitory and secret pictures which are able to shock the associative mechanism

10 See <https://dustn.tv/social-media-statistics/> for updated social media statistics [Accessed 8 November 2019]

of the observer to a standstill. At this point the caption must step in, thereby creating a photography which literarises the relationships of life and without which photographic construction would remain stuck in the approximate. (1972 [1931], p. 35)

The words 'transitory' and 'secret' are apt descriptors for smartphone photography: a ubiquitous tool that has multiple uses (reading, writing, texting, phoning) means that the integration between camera and body that Henning discusses is of a different nature, and using the screen *away* from the eye affords secrecy around the fact that a photo is being taken. However, this is dependent on the screen itself being out of sight of others, something that becomes more difficult to ensure as screens get larger.

Due to the camera phone's prevalence and ease of use, the 'decisive moment'—a phrase coined by Henri Cartier Bresson<sup>11</sup> to emphasize the importance of capturing a scene at precisely the right time—has become a somewhat redundant term, especially with readily available features such as the 'burst' on the iPhone, which mimics the action of the motor drive. The availability of storage that is cheap or even free for users means that no decision really needs to be made at all. Thus, many images present transitory moments that require an element of explanation similar to that which Benjamin highlights in regard to the ease of use of the Leica (1972 [1931], p. 35). Siegel's objectives of the photo album, 'to construct a visual and historical past for ourselves', and 'to entertain others and explain to them who we are' (pp. 239-53) remain unchanged within digital culture and now the construction, the explanation, the 'talking through', is performed via tag, message, tweet or status update. Rubinstein and Sluis argue that photo sharing is 'not just a portal for photographs but an amalgamation of mutually dependent visual and textual practices'. (p. 19)

## The tag and the movement of language

The tag has become a byword in the discourse on personal connectivity as it moves across networks to bind things, ideas and people together as well as aiding the indexing, retrieval and circulation, in what could be identified

11 In 1952 Henri Cartier-Bresson produced a book of the same name: *The Decisive Moment*, with his own texts and photographs and a cover by Henri Matisse. (Published in New York by Simon and Schuster)

as the 'archiving' of networked images through a combination of actions by human and system.

Like 'friends', tags or hashtags are 'followable' and 'unfollowable', but they are also powerful and monetarized; they are social spaces that exist within social spaces. Critically, they are reliant on the diverse motives of the tagger, ranging from making overtly personal choices of word or phrase, through to managing tags in order to get the best reach for their images by placing them in what they perceive as good company, by tagging people of influence and following recommendations on dedicated websites and apps. The user-generated tag (name, hashtag, or keyword) is not bound by the controlled and limited vocabularies that feature in institutional metadata systems, and there is more on this topic in Chapter 3. Although the practice of tagging may be flawed, there is little choice on whether or not to use them; they are so utterly embedded in our network culture, our software and our machines.

Generally speaking, people are happy to have their photographs tagged, liked or commented upon, and it is their aim to attract such attention, to facilitate wider viewing by replication. Paul Frosh, however, sees having a photograph of himself tagged, by someone on Facebook for example, as an intrusive procedure. He argues, 'one's body image is used to perform sociability on one's behalf, not only *in absentia* but according to the will of others and the logics of the apparatus'. (pp. 104-105) The privacy (and copyright) issues over the uncontrolled sharing of images are ever present in the context of networked archives, although institutions are able to choose not to share sensitive material, for example that which includes information on people still living.

In her essay 'In Defense of the Poor Image', Hito Steyerl explains how the much travelled and copied networked image is predisposed to deterioration:

It is the ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution [...] It transforms quality into accessibility [...] contemplation into distraction. (p. 32)

The tags that we attach to our networked images are in part to blame for fast digital distribution and the consequent deterioration of quality and meaning—yet it is not only images that move in these unpredictable ways, but also the language that is tied to them. If the image 'tends towards abstraction' (Steyerl, p. 32) then so does the tag. As photographs move into different

networked environments, they take their metadata with them; tags and keywords bring together otherwise unrelated images; the tags themselves are decontextualized and their meaning is shifted.

Rubinstein and Sluis observe how in the network milieu ‘we see our attention shift from the singular photographic image to image sequences: the image “pool”, the “slideshow”, the “photostream”, the image “feed”. (p. 22) And Joanna Drucker (p. 23) sees ‘the shift from entity to event’, as a fundamental change in the ontology of the photographic image, highlighting the paucity of the single photograph, and thus overlapping with Steyerl’s definition of the poor image cited above. Within photo-sharing sites and apps, a tag is often applied to all or several images in a group, so we are encouraged to look at the general and not the specific, the event and not the situation. These neat image sequences can end up fragmented as individual images flit around different networked spaces. Unpredictable groupings multiply and persist, allowing increasingly random taxonomies of word and image to emerge.

Frosh sees the tag as operative, ‘it possesses functionality within a technical system independent of its ostensive semantic meaning’. (p. 100) Tags are tactical media, creating, inhabiting their own territories of meaning: they do not simply express the connections between images, they construct new connections—and this is critical to their relationship with images, which might have nothing noteworthy in common with each other except for their tag. Rubinstein (p. 199) goes as far as to argue that ‘it is largely irrelevant whether an image is tagged with “chalk” or “cheese”; what matters is that through tagging the image is converted into a meaningful substance that enters an expressive relationship with other media objects such as the class of objects tagged with “cheese”. Here, Benjamin’s bold statement that it does not really matter whether the signposts provided to photographs by captions in magazines are right ones or wrong ones (1999, p. 220) (see Chapter 1), reverberates along the text-image timeline to the condition of the tag. But Rubinstein denies that the tag is merely an updated version of the image caption. He describes the tag not as a signpost but as a ‘meeting point’ for images (p. 199). This is a critical difference: signposts are static objects that direct out, whereas meeting points are easily moveable locations that pull things towards them as part of a pre-arranged system. Flusser describes the implicit difficulties of applying text as an intermediary: ‘If it is the intention of writing to mediate between humans and their images, it can also obscure images instead and insinuate itself between human beings and their images.’ (2000, p. 12) Indeed, it is a difficult task to satisfactorily articulate an image with *any* volume of words—the cataloguing of images

is a skilled occupation in the archive, and one absolutely designed not to obscure, as it focuses on visual content rather than context, and with a static and singular connection between image and text. The tag, on the other hand, is a marker that ties the image linguistically, but not necessarily visually, to fluctuating groups of images, hence the dilution and shift in meaning of the tag itself. My own screen-based work *Island* (2012) was primarily designed to reveal a perceived gap between the visual content-based description and the user-generated, event-based tag (screenshots from *Island* are reproduced in Chapter 5). The techniques of archival description were applied to a set of images retrieved from *Flickr*, which was at that time a social platform that was more oriented towards vernacular images; it was an easy to use storage and sharing space for family photos in the relative absence of other such spaces. The results did indeed show a great disparity between the visual content of the images, with a wide variety of images called up. None of the descriptions of visual content that I made contained the word ‘island’, or anything remotely similar in meaning.

Stimson (p. 43) argues that pictures themselves ‘hide, confuse, obfuscate and mislead’, and it is clear that the tagging system can unwittingly intensify these image traits. Rubinstein argues that the tag is a threat to the integrity of the photographic image: ‘a tag does not interpret the image, nor does it provide a context for it; instead it establishes complete identity between image and text and therefore strips the photograph of its own concrete and untranslatable language’. He concludes that the tag ‘promotes unseeing rather than seeing [...] tagging can be thought of as a strategy that allows one to remain immersed in photography without being affected by images’. (p. 199) Perhaps Rubinstein underestimates the visual acumen of the user and we could see this differently: the tagging system transports us to a vast milieu of images that we might otherwise overlook, and thus we are absolutely immersed in photography. And affect materializes in a number of ways, for example through seeing unexpected and nuanced juxtapositions of images that are brought together by a single descriptor, or just by seeing images *per se*. Although Rubinstein is writing in the context of how we see images in the more abstract sense, echoing Flusser’s worries over our ability to decode them (2000 [1983], pp. 57–58), ‘seeing’ and ‘unseeing’ are pertinent words in relation to the search and retrieval of images by keyword. If an image cannot be found, it is it invisible—it is only when we are brought inside this vast system of images that we are affected at all.

It is clear that once a word is attached to an image, the image inevitably undergoes a shift or a settlement in meaning; and yet instead of damaging what Rubinstein terms photography’s ‘untranslatable language’ (p. 199) I

would argue that the language of a photograph lies firmly in its relationship to the photographs around it, even if, in some cases, they are seemingly unrelated in content and held together by text. In this way, the archive itself affords a language, a sign system even, for the single image within it. This is an exceptionally reliable system in terms of the physical and static archive and the catalogue that parallels it with unforgiving accuracy. In the case of the networked image, however, the 'archive' system is relentlessly, unpredictably and uncontrollably changing. As Frosh argues, the social media image 'operates according to a dynamic logic of the transient data stream (think of the constantly updating Facebook news feed) rather than the more static, and less insistent, database'. (p. 107)

## Why tag?

In order to answer this question, Marlow et al analyse the motives for personal tagging, dividing users into two distinct groups:

The motivations to tag can be categorized into two high level practices: *organizational* and *social*. The first arises from the use of tagging as an alternative to structured filing; users motivated by this task may attempt to develop a personal standard and use common tags created by others. The latter expresses the communicative nature of tagging, wherein users attempt to express themselves, their opinions, and specific qualities of the resources through the tags they choose. (pp. 35-36 [original italics])

Yet it is unlikely that personal tagging practices via networks are ever purely organizational, or that the two practices described above do not overlap; the organizational group use 'common tags created by others' for the same reason that archives use metadata schemas made up of limited vocabularies: for reasons of interoperability, for communication across network spaces. For social media savvy users, tagging is a powerful method of communication, of sharing and of building relationships, and these are strong incentives for them to tag. However, incentives do not always promote image-accurate tagging, and whilst individuals clearly do not want to promote 'unseeing' (Rubinstein, p. 199), neither do they want their images to be innocent, to be 'cleared utopianically' of their connotations (Barthes, 1977, p. 42), because connotations are exactly what the social tagger wishes to proliferate. Social media users may see their photographs as being more akin to advertising images, and Rubinstein argues: 'Social networks encourage tagging as a

playful way of performing the self through the free association of words with images. The resulting blend of narcissism and marketing fuses identity politics with advertising while at the same time assisting computers with the identification of non-linguistic objects.' (p. 198) Thus, tagging one's own pictures, and especially 'selfies', is a subjective and highly egotistical activity; the tag becomes as significant as the image itself in terms of constructing and distributing a public persona. Frosh calls this out as a form of 'phatic' interaction (p. 104), where language is used purely for the purpose of social interaction.

Tagging is able to generate warm feelings of individuality, visibility and recognition. It is often sold by the search engine industry as an instrument of empowerment, when in fact it delivers more far greater power to corporations than to the individual. Ganaele Langlois argues that it is the reward systems embedded in such networks as Facebook that foster these feelings of power in the user, even though they are the tools of *corporate* power:

One of the biggest perks of being a 'good user' is to be recognized and seen by the rest of the network: the more I contribute on Facebook and interact with peers and accept lack of control over my own data, the more prominently my contributions will be featured, therefore, the more popular I will become; the more I review products on other social media platforms, the more I will be presented as a trustworthy contributor. (p. 56)

However, in addition to the rewards (shares, likes, comments) collected as a result of interaction and communication through our own social media accounts, there is a feel-good, social aspect to tagging that goes beyond immediate identity building and the gathering of ego bolstering 'likes'. Various large, institutional tagging projects encourage users to work together, broadly for the good of society. Collaborative cataloguing projects, where image tagging is extended to a very large group of participants, can give rise to surprisingly accurate metadata; engaging the skills of the many can be surprisingly productive in terms of generating reliable information.<sup>12</sup>

Axel Bruns, in his 2008 article in *Fibreculture Journal*, and on his website<sup>13</sup> coins the term *produsage* to describe these crowd-based cataloguing

12 This has been proven by the success of image-based collaborative project *Galaxy Zoo* at <https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/zookeeper/galaxy-zoo/> [Accessed 8 November 2019], where participants classify galaxies by looking at images and answering a series of questions on shape and other features, and without the need for specialist knowledge.

13 See <http://produsage.org/> [Accessed 8 November 2019]



practices, describing it as 'a widely distributed process of annotation at a distance'. He argues that it is successful because of two things: firstly it requires 'only a minute and therefore highly granular contribution from each individual user' and secondly: 'it allows for the emergence of probabilistic effects'. (2008a, p. 172) *Wikipedia* is an effective and valued product of this granular thinking—as Andrea Miconi confidently states, 'everybody agrees that Wikipedia is the most successful collaborative project on the web' (p. 93)—but even within the space of the archive or museum, the practice of tagging images by large groups of users is recognized as a valid way to catalogue images, and it is now in mainstream use, with large institutions such as the British Library and the Library of Congress uploading images to *Flickr* groups for users to tag. However, the results require careful monitoring on the side of the institution, making small organizations less inclined to make use of the community, which in turn may be relatively small. Bruns stresses the fact that the contributing community should be large (2008a, p. 4); using a small group of participants can produce strange anomalies, even though participants may be interested, educated, diligent and prepared to invest their time for free.

In the course of these collaborative projects, a folk taxonomy, or 'folk-sonomy', emerges, as the community collectively and involuntarily decides on which linguistic terms take precedence—terms largely dependent on their own cultural and social backgrounds. As is happening increasingly with individual tagging practices, keywords are shaped by the community and grow accordingly, and this spontaneous development can be problematic for cataloguing projects. Marlow et al explain: 'Because of their lack of predefined taxonomic structure, social tagging systems rely on shared and emergent social structures and behaviours, as well as related conceptual and linguistic structures of the user community.' (p. 31) James Surowiecki argues in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds* that collaborative tagging gives better results when contributors are not able to influence each other, because it 'keeps the mistakes people make from becoming correlated' (p. 41). Once a particular group of users starts to emerge, conformity or 'herding' becomes a threat to the independent nature of user-generated data, as members exert influence on each other (*ibid.*, p 42).

Rubinstein states: 'The importance of tagging for the economies of the web lies precisely in the bridging of the gap between human perception of images and the computer's blindness to them.' (p. 198) The reason for the broad success of collaborative cataloguing projects is that interpretation and classification of images remains a task best performed directly by humans, even though there has been great progress in the field of computer image

recognition; the results of image recognition algorithms may be frequently ridiculed, but research into artificial neural networks has delivered exciting and accurate results in terms of the recognition of objects. However, the machine learning required for practical application (such as image description in the archive) is extensive and therefore not always cost efficient, even though cataloguing by archivists is a time-consuming and specialized activity and is therefore also high cost in institutional terms. Human digital labour schemes, on the other hand, are extremely cheap; people will readily work for free for organizations they perceive as worthy, or, alternatively, for major corporations in exchange for very small payments. Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk),<sup>14</sup> named after a famous eighteenth-century chess-playing automaton, was founded in 2005 and it exists to crowdsource 'HITS' (Human Intelligence Tasks). As a Mechanical Turk worker—known informally as a *Turker*—one can earn up to \$4.95 for 4 hours 30 minutes of microtasking, which includes image and video processing. This rate of pay is presumably if one works as fast as a machine: Mechanical Turk once openly labelled itself as 'Artificial Artificial Intelligence', although I am unable to find that term on its website now; instead, it uses the more accurate and somewhat warmer wording, 'human intelligence'. What is significant to the human versus machine debate is that machine learning for image description is based upon datasets such as ImageNet,<sup>15</sup> which in turn are built on human digital labour schemes.

It is quite clear that collaborative cataloguing practices can be flawed in a number of ways: they may suffer from low user numbers; a community is predisposed to follow the crowd; they are difficult and expensive to regulate; and I would add that they still trade in the single word or short phrase descriptor, which can be problematic in itself. However, in their favour, they are open in nature and constitute a 'bottom-up subjective categorisation system'; a 'hyperlink created by the user' (Rubinstein & Sluis, p. 19). Although they may promote and adopt their own linguistic terminology, they remain relatively unrestricted by prearranged sets of limited vocabularies and thesaurus terms that can be unfamiliar, counter-intuitive and inadequate. Instead their terms develop organically, through 'the language and usage patterns of real users' (Gene Smith, p. 85). Surowiecki explains the significance of the community to individual contributors thus:

14 For more information, including on how to become a 'Turker' see the Mechanical Turk website at <https://www.mturk.com> [Accessed 8 November 2019]

15 See the ImageNet website for information on the construction of the database <http://image-net.org/update-sep-17-2019> [Accessed 16 November 2019]

'We are autonomous beings, but we are also social beings. We want to learn from each other and learning is a social process.' (p. 42)

Nancy Van House, in her paper on the photo site Flickr, lists four explicitly social uses of personal photography as: construction of memory, narrative and identity; reflecting and sustaining relationships; self-representation; and self-expression (n.p.). A similar reasoning is cited by Bourdieu, who identifies the rationale for popular photograph in the 1960s, listing five areas of motivation for 'photographic satisfaction' as 'protection against time, communication with others and the expression of feelings, self-realization, social prestige, distraction or escape'. (p. 14) Both Van House's and Bourdieu's lists of motivations are today well aligned with the uploading of photographs to image and hashtag-based social networking platforms such as Instagram, or more the conversational space of Facebook. Based on the habits of his study group, Bourdieu describes shared family photographs thus: 'Like letters, and better than letters: the photograph has its role to play in the continual updating of family information' (p. 22). Trends in digital photo sharing replicate this view, except that images have moved from the personal space of the home to be subsumed—'archived'—within corporate networks.

## Works Cited

- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press
- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Vintage.
- Belkhir, L. & Elmeli, A. (2018). Assessing ICT Global Emissions Footprint: Trends to 2040 & Recommendations. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 177 (2018), 448-463.
- Benjamin, W. (1972). A Short History of Photography. *Screen*, 13, 5-26.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Photography: a Middle-Brow Art*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: from Production to Produsage*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bruns, A. (2008a). The Future is User-Led: the Path towards Widespread Produsage. *Fibreculture Journal* [Online], 11. Available at: <http://eleven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-066-the-future-is-user-led-the-path-towards-widespread-produsage/> [Accessed 9 May 2018]
- Cubitt, S. (2010). The Latent Image, *Inaugural International Conference on the Image*. [Online]. UCLA. Available at: <http://www.visualfields.co.uk/Cubitt.pdf> [Accessed 18 May 2018]
- Drucker, J. (2010). Temporal Photography. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 22-28.
- Flusser, V. (1999). *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*. London:

Reaktion Books.

Flusser, V. (2000). *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. London: Reaktion Books.

Frosh, P. (2019). *The Poetics of Digital Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gat, O. (2019). How the JPEG Changed Everything. *Frieze* [Online], 4 February 2019.

Henning, M. (2018). *Photography: the Unfettered Image*. London: Routledge.

Kittler, F. A. (1999). *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Langlois, G. (2013). Social Media, or Towards a Political Economy of Psychic Life.

In G. Lovink & M. Rasch (Eds.), *Unlike Us Reader: Social Monopolies and their Alternatives* (pp. 50-60). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

*Mad Men*. Season 1, Episode 13: 'The Wheel'. First aired 18 October 2007. Available at: [https://youtu.be/v\\_B7HiLQuMk](https://youtu.be/v_B7HiLQuMk) [Accessed 30 April 2018]

Marcus, S., Love, H. & Best, S. (2016). Building a Better Description. *Representations* 135/1, 1-21.

Marlow, C., Naaman, M., Boyd, D. & Davis, M. (2006). *Hypertext 06: Proceedings of the Seventeenth Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia* [Online]. Odense, Denmark: ACM, New York, NY. Available at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~koutrika/Readings/res/Default/p31marlow.pdf> [Accessed 6 June 2012]

Miconi, A. (2013). Under the Skin of the Network: How Concentration Affects Social Practices in Web 2.0 Environments. In G. Lovink & M. Rasch (Eds.), *Unlike Us Reader: Social Monopolies and their Alternatives* (pp. 89-102). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

Müller-Pohle, A. (2011). Fotografie, die Feinden der Privatheit. *European Photography*, 90, Fall/Winter 2011, 3.

Nelson, R. S. (2000). The Slide Lecture, or The Work of Art History in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Spring 2000), 414-434.

Parikka, J. (2013). Archival Media Theory: an Introduction to Wolfgang Ernst's Media Archaeology. In W. Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (pp. 1-22). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Rubinstein, D. (2010). Encyclopaedia: Tag, Tagging. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 197-200.

Rubinstein, D. & Sluis, K. (2008). A Life More Photographic. *Photographies*, 1, 9- 28.

Ryan, M.-L. (2008). Narrative. In D. Herman, M. Jahn & M.-L. Ryan (Eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (pp. 344-348). London: Routledge.

Sekula, A. (1982). On the Invention of Photographic Meaning. In V. Burgin (Ed.), *Thinking Photography* (pp. 84-109). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Sekula, A. (1984). *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks 1973-1983*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Sekula, A. (2003). Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital. In L. Wells (Ed.), *The Photography Reader* (pp. 443-452). London: Routledge.

- Siegel, E. (2003). Talking Through the 'Fotygraft Album'. In A. Hughes & A. Noble (Eds.), *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative* (pp. 239-253). Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Smith, G. (2008). *Tagging: People-Powered Metadata for the Social Web*. Berkeley, California: New Riders.
- Steyerl, H. (2012). *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Stimson, B. (2010). Photography and Ontology. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 41- 47.
- Surowiecki, J. (2005). *The Wisdom of Crowds*. London: Abacus.
- van House, N. A. (2007). Flickr and Public Image-Sharing: Distant Closeness and Photoexhibition. *CHI '07 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computer Systems (CHI 2007)* [Online]. San Jose, California: University of California. Available at: <http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~vanhouse/VanHouseFlickrDistantCHI07.pdf> [Accessed 16 August 2012]
- Weidner, T. (n.d.). 35mm Slide Medium. Tate website. Available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/dying-technologies-end-35-mm-slide-transparencies/35-mm-slide-medium> [Accessed 20 April 2018]

### 3 Catalogue, list, description

#### Abstract

The discussion moves inside the archive to look at institutional cataloguing systems. The notion of original order, with its inherent discontinuities, is examined in relation to image sets and catalogue lists, interstitial forms that allow the archive to be visualized and understood. The description of the single image, a literal rendition of visual content, is dissected, as is the reading of the image through this grey institutional form. Yet the description is a participatory object that lends itself to speculation, even though measures are taken to limit this. There is a critique of the use of metadata schemas in archives; schemas do well in terms of networking and interoperability but may be poor in terms of description and therefore discoverability.

**Keywords:** archive science; catalogue; list; description; original order; schema

The processes of archival description, arrangement and storage are features of the archive that remain largely unseen to the researcher. They are best understood and explained from a position inside the archive, when one is not pursuing a particular line of research; not focusing on the content and meaning of individual objects or collections but instead on the systems that hold them in place and allow them to be used. Through my work inside the archive, I am privileged to observe the spaces, systems and practices from inside the institution: the corridors, offices and strongrooms; the documents, files, boxes and shelves, and the intense human labour involved in the cataloguing, conservation, preservation and storage of objects. Perhaps most pertinent here is the increased understanding of the media materiality and the operational importance of the catalogue, and the units of description within it, both of which I have been compelled to explore as artist and scholar.

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on systems of archival management, and subsequent knowledge production, through cataloguing and listing

---

Birkin, J., *Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2021

DOI: 10.5117/9789463729642\_CH03

techniques that parallel and visualize the storage space of the archive. Thus, an understanding of the archive as a physical entity is afforded to the reader, even if they cannot be in it or see it. Although some archive theory is put forward to provide historical context, examinations of archival methods, such as detailed record keeping practices and the maintenance of original order, are largely situated in theoretical approaches from outside of archival science. They are viewed from perspectives that might seem unfamiliar to archivists or the bodies that dictate archival practice, for example, an examination of the list as operational media type. Drilling down to object-level, the description of the single image is scrutinized in particular. This is done not only through an examination of how descriptions are written, but also from the point of view of the reader, with a discussion of its reception in the archive and elsewhere. The description of the single image is considered in terms of how it parallels and represents the image, also asking what it does for the image in more abstract terms.

## Order and disarray

Following the rules and standards put forward by such organizations as the International Council on Archives,<sup>1</sup> an archive materializes as a *system*, a hierarchical arrangement that begins with the building or institution itself, a place that is also somewhat confusingly termed ‘the archive’. Placed inside this outer ‘bricks and mortar’ casing is a network of strongrooms and shelves. Here, the archive object is placed in a folder; the folder within a box; the box stacked with associated boxes at a specified shelf location. In this way, an archive presents itself physically as a series of containers that appear from the outside as uniform, organized blocks of information (Figure 3.1). However, the view from inside the box is quite different, as the order—and the groupings contained within this order—are not imposed by the archivist, but instead take their lead from the collection and the objects

<sup>1</sup> The International Council on Archives, in their publication *ISAD (G): General International Archival Description*, lay out the hierarchical structure of the archive in technical terms:

The fonds forms the broadest level of description; the parts form subsequent levels, whose description is often only meaningful when seen in the context of the description of the whole of the fonds. Thus, there may be a fonds-level description, a series-level description, a file-level description and/or an item-level description. Intermediate levels, such as a sub-fonds or sub-series, may be expected. Each of these levels may be further subdivided according to the complexity of the administrative structure and/or functions of the organization which generated the archival material and the organization of the material. (2000, p 8)



Figure 3.1 Strongroom, Special Collections, University of Southampton.  
Courtesy of the Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.

within it. As Ben Highmore observes, 'however contained and constrained [the archive] appears it is always spilling out beyond its organisational structures' (n.p.). One continually finds groupings and objects that resist the tiered organization of the archive; the international Council on Archives clearly states that the hierarchical model of levels of description that they put forward 'does not include all possible combinations of levels. Any number of intermediate levels are possible' (p. 36).

Markus Krajewski recounts how Melvil Dewey was convinced that efficiency in the library would be achieved through uniform cataloguing techniques of uniform materials, hence his establishment of the Dewey



Decimal Classification system for books in 1876 (p. 90). Archives are conspicuously lacking in both material and conceptual uniformity. As Judith Ellis points out in her practical book *Keeping Archives* (which remains a valuable resource for anyone thinking of setting up a small archive), libraries deal with 'consciously authored information products' (p. 11) and not with the rich, complex and variously kept records of a life or an organization that we find in the archive. So, although libraries and archives often sit side by side physically and are linked institutionally, they are vastly different entities when it comes to their organization and their storage systems. Another important difference is that libraries can generally be browsed, whereas archives cannot.

What is crucial is that archives are not organized or stored in a strict chronological or typological order, or an order of assumed importance, but in the order in which the objects accumulated and were re-ordered by the individual or organization from which they originated. It is known as a diachronic or developmental ordering system. Thus, the archival term 'original order' relates to the order of the collection as it enters the institution and is perhaps better defined by the French term *respect des fonds*, a respect for the groupings, the objects and the significance of their prior use. A photograph, for example, may be pinned to a non-contemporaneous letter, or a document may have been very obviously removed from one place by the owner and deposited in another for a particular reason. These arrangements represent potentially significant temporal deviations that need to be recorded and maintained. In some cases, objects could in fact be ordered by time, type or importance, or in a combination of discrete pockets of all these things. Original order is then fundamentally a system of critical *disorder*.

Wolfgang Ernst informs us that the old English language word *tellan* comes from the old German, meaning 'to put in order'. He notes that that *to tell* can mean to count—hence the presence of a *teller* at an election count or in a bank. He argues:

To *tell* as a transitive verb means 'to count things'. When all sensual dimensions are quantifiable, even the temporal resolution, telling gets liberated from the narrative grip—a media-archaeological amnesia of cultural techniques like that of the early medieval *annales*, sequential notations of temporal events with no metahistorical, narrative prefiguration. We get a glimpse of a way of processing cultural experience that does not need stories (not yet? not any more?). Modern historians, though, are obliged not just to order data as in antiquaries but also to propose models of relations between them, to interpret plausible connections between events. (2013, pp. 148-149).

In this, Ernst concurs with Foucault (2002, pp. 7-9) regarding the non-chronological nature of modern historical research and reporting, but he is also positioning the non-narrative processing of cultural experience in the context of network storage and retrieval systems. As well as demonstrating the organization and clustering of data within networks that are unseen from the outside, Ernst's example represents a typical arrangement in the archive, where pockets of chronological data sit inside other less time-ordered (though static) structures and are numbered according to this arrangement.

Ellis maintains that any attempt at rearrangement, any break with original order, whether accidental or contrived, 'can compromise the integrity of the records and destroy or mask the evidence provided by their original arrangement and juxtapositioning'. (p. 11) And as Ernst robustly argues, one cannot remove part of an archive without destroying the system:

The administrative archive in the strict sense is a read-only memory. One cannot simply take out archival records because they are politically incorrect, neither can the archival order as such (key term 'tectonics') be easily changed according to a new discursive will. Just like in computing, a rewriting of code in the operating system would make the whole system collapse. It is exactly the non-discursive and non-narrative structure of the archive which makes it such a uniquely powerful institution. (2016, p. 10)

As individuals, we are culturally programmed to sort—and to think by sorting—and there is great unease in resisting this. The problem is that original order, which might reveal the thinking and sorting methodologies that went before, cannot be recovered once it is lost. For the archival system to work at all, rearrangement or removal of objects must be resisted.

The concept of original order was formalized in the late 1800s by Dutch archivists Muller and Van Riemsdijk, and authored as *The Manual for Arrangement and Description of Archives: Drawn up by the Netherlands Association of Archivists* (commonly known as *The Dutch Manual*) by Muller, Feith and Fruin in 1898. According to Eric Ketelaar it was Van Riemsdijk who pioneered the approach of maintaining original order, as 'he tried to understand why and how records were created and used by their original users, rather than how they might be used in the future' (p. 33). The idea that one should not try to anticipate the specific future use of an object, but should instead allow for all possible uses, is fundamental to the latent potentialities of archive materials.

Sir Hilary Jenkinson was a noted archivist with a background in the Public Record Office of the United Kingdom (a precursor of the National Archives) and a strong belief that keeping archives was a mission of public service. He produced another key text on the organization of archives, the *Manual of Archive Administration*, first published in 1922 and reprinted in 1937. Jenkinson defines the role of the archivist thus:

The Archivist's career ... is one of service. He exists in order to make other people's work possible, unknown people for the most part and working very possibly on lines equally unknown [...] His creed, the Sanctity of Evidence; his Task, the Conservation of every scrap of Evidence attaching to the Documents committed to his care; his Aim, to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know, the Means of Knowledge. ([1948] quoted in Ellis, p. 12)

Jenkinson's specification that objects should be kept and cared for 'without prejudice or afterthought' underscores the impartial recordkeeping aspect of archive cataloguing practices. It also supports his views on appraisal (on determining the value of material to an institution); he maintained that every last scrap of material available should be kept and recorded. This is entirely consistent with his emphasis on the interrelatedness of materials.

There have been many challenges by scholars of archival science to Jenkinson's thinking. Some see his ideas on appraisal as not being scalable to modern archives, due to the sheer volume of materials that now accumulate. Paige Hohmann names archivist and archival scholar T.R. Schellenberg (1903-1970) as a challenger in this respect, explaining how Schellenberg's ideas on appraisal prioritize potential future scholarly use as a key factor in the selection of archives (Hohmann, pp. 15-20). This directly contests the ideas of both Jenkinson and Van Riemsdijk, as it puts a hypothetical future use above a clear recordkeeping methodology that affords *any* possible future use. Jenkinson's views are also challenged by those who believe that archivists should play a more interpretive role when creating catalogue records, such as Terry Cook, whose ideas are touched on in Chapter 1. However, Jenkinson's text is still thought of as fundamental to archival theory and practice, and his ideas on impartiality and interrelatedness are 'built in to the guiding ethic' (ibid., p. 24) of even his rivals' methodologies. Even though the idea of keeping everything might be viewed by archive theorists as impractical today, his position on appraisal, that 'selection is never, ever lossless' (ibid. p. 15) is accepted.

The very notion of original order, with its unexpected connections, relationships and discontinuities, supports Foucault's views on modern historical analysis. He argues that the 'discontinuous' is a concept that was alien to classical historians, positing it as 'the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history'. He puts forward the idea that discontinuity has now become 'both an instrument and an object of research' and he maintains that it must cease to be seen as hindrance, but instead it must become a 'working concept' (2002, p. 10). Contemporary historical research, as Foucault argues, centres on the search for new avenues of knowledge and it is not overly concerned with chronologies (2002, p. 9), making it eminently suitable to archival research. The views on seriality, groupings and discontinuities (and connected research methods), which he puts forward in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, can be applied to the archive in the context of establishing new knowledge from non-chronological and lacunose collections of archive objects.

## Cataloguing and 'listing' as knowledge formation

Outside of any new knowledge that might be established through reconfigurations and realizations by researchers, archives in their original state have distinct epistemological worth, and this condition is contingent on the preservation of original order from the moment the archive is unpacked. It involves making an initial inventory, with the recording and numbering of every item in the order in which it arrives. This work—known in archive terminology as 'listing'—is often carried out by an archive assistant, and always, as Jenkinson stipulates, 'without prejudice' (Ellis, p. 12). If and when time allows, the preliminary list can be expanded upon with more detailed descriptions of individual objects, but the order of the objects, as recorded in the initial list, does not alter. Liam Cole Young argues that knowledge formation is integral to list making itself: 'By combining and stabilizing data so that it can be mobilized as knowledge, lists are constitutive of epistemology.' (2017, p. 47) Both listing and full cataloguing practices should therefore not be perceived *simply* as recordkeeping or documentation, but as part of a complex—albeit standardized—system of knowledge production. Similarly, in respect of what can be termed a visual list or inventory, Gregorio Magnani argues that August Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* project introduced to photography 'the model of the archive as a site in which knowledge may be produced rather than simply documented' (p. 81).

Theorists have recently begun to pay more attention to the list as a media form that performs distinct operations, and this in part is presented as a media-archaeological connection to lists in network culture, from software structures, to databases, to search results. For example, Young argues that lists ‘are important to media theory because they link familiar techniques of data organization and control with those that are much older’ (2017, p. 14). The archive and its methods of ordering and recording information have palpable links to ‘archiving’ techniques that exist in network culture. Listing in the archive not only involves words, but also numbers: everything, to the last scrap of paper, is enumerable, and when individually listed and numbered is defined as a discrete unit with a unique identifier. Young emphasizes the media-archaeological aspects surrounding the materiality of the list, for example in the case of a paper list: ‘It is not the list that moves through an office, but the paper on which it is written. It would be more correct to say that the list is itself an entity that is excavated by a media archaeology of paper.’ (ibid., p. 37) In a similar way, Krajewski traces the history of the card catalogue, always from a material point of view, as a ‘paper machine’ that moved from library to office environment and helped paving the way for punch card technologies (still based on paper) as well as forming the conceptual model for Turing’s 1936 *universal discrete machine* (pp. 6-8). The fact that the standalone archive catalogue is often termed the ‘paper catalogue’, or ‘paper list’, even though it may also be read online, is therefore significant. By using this term, this static media object (usually a PDF) is differentiated from a fully networked and searchable online catalogue that is able to order differently and variously, often focusing on interoperability with other archives and collections.<sup>2</sup>

The word ‘list’ has a dual use, as a verb and a noun, in the archive and elsewhere: first to collect information, and secondly to disseminate it. Christopher Hood and Helen Margetts use the language of cybernetics to define the dual use of administrative tools of government, such as the list: firstly as ‘detector’, for taking in information; and secondly as ‘effector’, to try to make an impact on the world outside (p. 3). The list is an exceptionally convincing effector; it appears indexical and objective and this alone makes it an invaluable tool for government and a basic instrument of administrative power. Archives are built upon the structure of the list: objects are listed and the contents of an archive are presented to us in list form. Furthermore,

2 See for example, the National Archives ‘Discovery’ search facility [<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>], which finds records not only from the National Archives, but from over 2500 other UK archives.

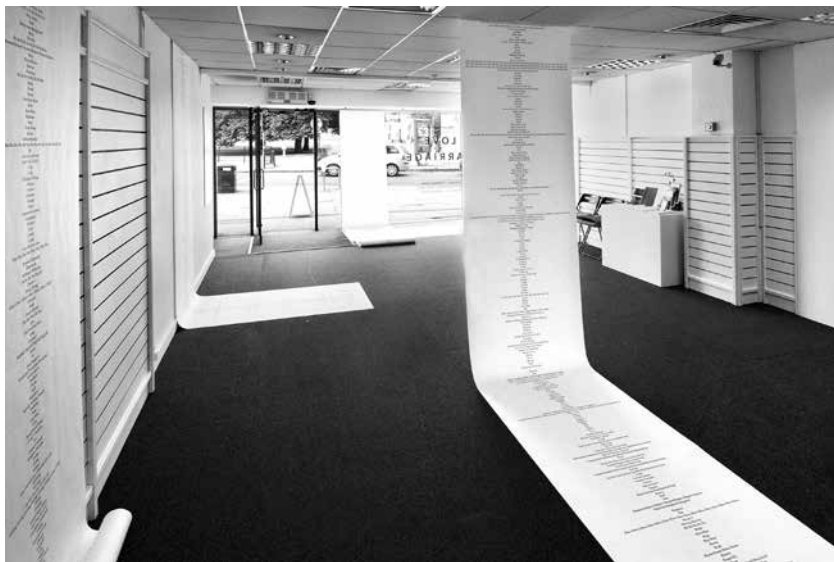


Figure 3.2 Hetain Patel, installation view from *Love and Marriage* (2012).  
Courtesy Hetain Patel and John Hansard Gallery. Photo: Steve Shrimpton.

archives are populated by objects that fall into the category of list: rolls, registers, accounts and inventories, many of them government and legal documents that continue to have authority, are commonplace in archives. If the list is an instrument of administrative power, then it follows that archives are as well.

With British-Asian artist Hetain Patel's 2012 piece *Love and Marriage* (Figure 3.2) we are confronted by lists in an unfamiliar setting and on an unfamiliar scale, as they fill most of the walls and floor space of a small gallery. Patel's lists are formed through analysis of transcripts of interviews on love and marriage conducted in the Asian community in Southampton. The interviewees' words are systematically alphabetized and repeated to match the exact number of times they are used in the interview. These lists engage and enlighten in a way that the original transcripts might not; a tangible reveal of the role of the list as 'effector' (Hood and Margetts, p. 3). Young sees the list as a highly visual method of spatial organization: 'A form such as the list forges units, relations, and *caesuras* via other visual means—borders, columns, numbers, lines, words, commas etc.—and as a result helps us to see and to imagine strange resonances between words, things, data, and people that might otherwise escape our grasp.' (2014, n.p.) And he argues, 'listing draws things together and places them in relation to one another. As visual forms of information, lists show us previously

unseen things. Connections are forged and relations become traceable.’ (2017, p. 47) This is exactly how and why *Love and Marriage* works so well: the lists are able to extend the impact of the prose of the original interviews by providing an immediate insight into themes and emphases, archiving and indexing in a graphic and quantifiable way the occurrences of the words used. Listing in alphabetical order forces new juxtapositions, revealing poetic relationships between words and ideas that might not be evident in the original transcripts.

Young informs us that the use of lists ranges from ancient Sumarian clay tablets, through early forms of referencing in antique libraries and alphabetization in mediaeval information management, to today’s web protocols. Listing is, he argues, ‘an ancient cultural technique’ (2017, p. 14). In his book *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real* Bernhard Siegert argues that operative forms of writing such as calculus, cards, and catalogs are all valuable in the study of cultural techniques. He explains how the term ‘cultural technique’ originates from the late-nineteenth century German term *Kulturtechnik*, referring to agricultural techniques such as ploughing or dividing up the land with enclosures, and then in the 1970s coming to stand for basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic (Siegert 2015, pp. 9-11). But counting and writing existed long before numbers and alphabets were conceptualized. Thomas Macho explains: ‘People wrote long before they conceptualized writing or alphabets; millennia passed before pictures and statues gave rise to the concept of the image; and until today, people sing or make music without knowing anything about tones or musical notation systems. Counting, too, is older than the notion of numbers.’ (p. 179) Likewise, listing is an ancient technique, used in both personal and administrative milieu since records began. In her book *Files: Law and Media Technology*, Media theorist Cornelia Vismann traces the list back as far as the Babylonian Empire. She recounts how these early lists were first misunderstood as narrative texts and, as such, they defied numerous attempts at translation. In 1935 the Babylonian lists were finally accepted as non-syntactical writing, as ‘administrative notes rather than epic texts’, and this recognition enabled their translation. They subsequently provided valuable evidence of the organization and governance of day-to-day life of the time. Vismann uses the term ‘second writing scene’ to describe listing, whilst at the same time recognizing the power of this simple form to control and to regulate (pp. 6-7).

Archive listing is a performative documentation of objects as they emerge; rules are followed and there are no options regarding the order in which things are listed—and subsequently filed, boxed and stored. As Vismann

argues, lists ‘govern the inside of the file world, from their initial compilation to their final storage’. Writing in the context of law files and their temporal accumulation in the courtroom, she goes on to explain how a file contains its own progression and terms this kind of writing ‘the live transfer of an event’. She argues that files ‘not only fix a result but also shed light on their own development [...] Hence they attract all researchers who are interested in origins’ (pp. 7-8). This is entirely fitting to writing techniques and their affordances within the archive. The cataloguing of an archive fixes it for all time, but it also sheds light on its origins, its progression and on the diachronic nature of archives.

In her essay ‘Ordering, Searching, Finding’, Nina Lager Vestberg asks the pertinent question ‘How does archival order affect the production of knowledge and meaning?’ (p. 473) She addresses this question with a study of the photographic collections of the Warburg and the Conway Libraries in London, both of them relatively small and operating on an open access basis. My specific point of interest here is Vestberg’s observation that because these two collections are not fully catalogued they rely on the physical storage as a finding aid: ‘the filing cabinets and boxes are, at one and the same time, repositories for the “things themselves” and catalogues explaining what things are’. Vestberg argues that the archive in this case, by virtue of the user’s interaction with its arrangement, becomes a ‘machine for thinking’.<sup>3</sup> Vestberg’s point is that ‘looking around and thinking with a physical archive can help you in a different sense to *find* it—that is, to realize and contextualize its significance in and as a broader set of findings’ (pp. 486-487 [original italics]).<sup>4</sup>

The situation in the Warburg and the Conway Libraries is an unusual one: catalogue and archive generally exist as two different media forms that are separately kept. Vismann, providing a historical perspective to the idea of separation, recounts the story of how France’s ‘royal chapel’, that is, the repository of all the documents of the kingdom of Philip II (he

3 This phrase is taken from Carlo Ginzburg’s essay ‘Une Machine à Penser’, published in 2012 in the journal *Common Knowledge* (vol 1, no 1). Ginzburg recounts his apprenticeship in the Warburg Library in the 1960s, where, by virtue of Warburg’s classification and storage system, he comes across a rare book that would otherwise have been extremely difficult to locate.

4 It must be noted that in the two photographic collections that Vestberg examines considerable and structured thinking has already materialized, hence, as she suggests, their designation as ‘library’. Famously, the Warburg Collection is classified according to Aby Warburg’s theories on iconography—and also with reference to photography as an *enabler* of this kind of classification (a theme that is considered in Chapter 1 of this book). Conway, a contemporary of Warburg, also organized his collection, first by medium and then by location.



ruled from 1180 to 1223), was looted by Richard the Lionheart. Had it not been for the commitment of a young man named Gautier of Nemour, who took it upon himself to painstakingly piece together and make a record of the key papers of the realm, creating the 'royal French registry' the whole administrative structure and power of the kingdom would have been lost. Gautier's smart idea was soon adopted throughout Europe, meaning that state archives themselves could be safely left at home as rulers travelled, with documentation representing actual records (pp. 76-77). Like Gautier of Nemour's list, the modern catalogue records and preserves the structure and sometimes the content of the archive, as transcriptions duplicate the information in manuscripts and descriptions duplicate the information contained in images.

However, the main reason for the separation of catalogue and object today is that many archives are too big and their storage systems too complex for the kind of physical interaction that Vestberg describes in the Warburg and Conway Libraries. For example, the Keep, near Brighton on the south coast of England, houses the combined collections of the East Sussex Record Office, the Royal Pavilion & Museums Local History Collections and the University of Sussex Special Collections (including the fascinating Mass Observation Archive, documenting everyday life in Britain). Their integrated archives take up eight miles of shelving over a number of distinct and specialized storage spaces. Consequently, the visitor to such a large archive rarely sees the physical arrangement of objects, except for perhaps an occasional glimpse of the box from which their requested files or items are temporarily removed. Nonetheless, a type of interaction can take place that allows the contextualization and the understanding that Vestberg describes, and this is through engagement with the catalogue that relates to the archive material. Due to the fact that the catalogue matches and describes the physical arrangement of the archive, it may be perceived, like the archive itself, as being made up of randomly arranged and fragmentary pieces of information. It is only when the catalogue of a given archive is considered as an entity that the discrete nature of the components disintegrates and a sense of belonging, significance, context and order—often still exhibiting superficially as disorder—slowly develops.

The catalogue defines for the reader the scope of the collection, as it lays out, line-by-line and page-by-page, descriptions that reflect hierarchies and physical relationships between discrete objects and between object sets. The catalogue list is a spatially critical form. It is a system of interstitial writing that describes a system of interstitial storage; a tiered interface of lists within lists; a form of data visualization that affords an understanding

of time, hierarchies and relationships. Vismann, terms this aspect of the list, 'the spatial logic of *place value systems*' (p. 7 [original italics]). But not only does the catalogue list the items, and situate them according to their storage, it often describes the storage itself, stating the specific numbers of boxes and files and the amount of shelf space that an archive or a constituent part of an archive (known as a 'unit of description') occupies. The International Council on Archives (pp. 16-17 [original italics]) provides guidelines regarding the provision of details of the 'extent and medium' of a unit:

Record the extent of the unit of description by giving the number of physical or logical units in arabic numerals and the unit of measurement. Give the specific medium (media) of the unit of description.

*Alternatively*, give the linear shelf space or cubic storage space of the unit of description. If the statement of extent for a unit of description is given in linear terms and additional information is desirable, add the additional information in parentheses.

And it gives examples of how this might be done, including the following:

103.5 cubic feet (98 boxes) (*Fonds*)  
U.S., *Minnesota Historical Society*

1 folder, containing 38 items (*File*)  
U.S., *Minnesota Historical Society*

5 folders and 2 audio cassettes (*Fonds*)  
U.S., *Minnesota Historical Society*

143 rolls of microfilm, 35mm (*Series*)  
U.S. *National Archives & Records Administration*  
2.7metres (19 boxes + 1 oversized item) (*Fonds*)  
*National Library of Australia*  
*Documentos textuais: 2,21 m (Fonds)*  
*Brazil, Arquivo Nacional*

Whilst the catalogue is primarily a record, and a finding aid in the simple sense of it being used by a researcher to locate a document, its presentation can afford an imagining not only of the object itself, but also of the material qualities of the hidden storage. Once imagined and visualized, the archive,

its space and its structure, and the unique position of the single object relative to this space and structure, can be considered and more clearly understood as part of a physical network of interconnected objects. The catalogue itself becomes a machine for thinking.

## Writing the image

All levels of archival arrangement are identified in general terms as units of description, whether they are *fonds*, series, files or single items (International Council on Archives, p. 7). At the end of the cataloguing hierarchy lies the description of the single item, although this concluding unit is sometimes not described at all, with information ending at folder level or earlier. This could be because of the time constraints of the cataloguer: the task is left in an unfinished but operational state, with a view to completing the work, filling in the gaps, at a later date. When it does appear, the item- or object-level description varies in form and detail: the description of a letter might simply record the date, the sender and the recipient, whilst letters perceived to have historical significance might be fully transcribed in the catalogue. The International Council on Archives defines the single object, or 'item' as the 'smallest intellectually indivisible archival unit' that can be described (p. 11), a definition that elicits comparisons to Foucault's designation of the 'statement' as an 'ultimate, undecomposable element that here can be isolated [...]. The atom of discourse.' (2002, p. 90) Both these definitions exist in the context of seriality and are concerned with part-to-whole relationships and the operative connections between parts.

An archival description of a single photograph has special significance because of the way in which the visual object is incorporated into the text-based recordkeeping ecosystem, and into the passive, institutional language of the catalogue list. An image description is written in prose and is predominantly a record of the visual content of the image. Thus, it can be perceived as an inventory, as a stock-take of visual elements with small connecting words that situate these elements and explain the spatiotemporal conditions of the image in an economical way. Contextual information is usually stored at higher levels of description (collection or folder level) leaving the object-level description predominately context free: a discrete object that is in turn discretely described. Although the description might be perceived as dull and lifeless, as the polar opposite of the object that it describes, image descriptions present a novel way of writing an image—and of reading it—positioned, as description firmly is, outside of the field of

hermeneutical image analysis: this writing system is a form of information management and it does not attempt to interpret or decode the object with which it engages. Placed outside of the system of signs that is usually considered in discussions of photographic representation and situated within the permanently revealing organizational system of the archive, it is what Siegert terms in relation to the conceptualization of cultural techniques and the materiality of media, 'Post-hermeneutical, rather than anti-hermeneutical in its outlook' (2013, p. 48).

Archive-based image description can be perceived as a translation between two different media, comparable to inter-lingual translation in terms of rules and pre-defined procedures. A visual content-based description, applying restricted institutional language and record-keeping methodologies, provides a literal translation of an image, as it catalogues visual elements and the spatial relationships between them, whilst staying within our systems of shared knowledge and language use. It can be compared to the 'word for word' translation of texts between languages, especially technical texts—and the photograph is a technical medium, after all—where an analysis of meaning is deemed quite unnecessary. In 1958, translation theorists Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet put forward seven exact procedures for translation (pp. 92-93), and in common with the early instructions for archivists set out in *The Dutch Manual* these are clear and direct. Both these models were thought of as progressive when they were first put forward and they have both endured to a great extent, even as new opinions have emerged.

Wolfram Wilss, however, in his book *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behaviour*, takes a more practical approach, suggesting that systems of rules in translation could be developed to such a degree that creativity and intuition might be done away with altogether (pp. 145-146). But Vinay and Darbelnet (their own seven directives increase incrementally in terms of creativity and intuition) argue that outside of purely technical texts this kind of literal, rules based translation can only go so far before the translator faces an obstacle, and they lament the non-existence of a set of rules for signification, 'a conceptual dictionary with bi-lingual signifiers'. (pp. 87-88) In any case, they see literal translation as limited, and the unequivocal transfer from source to target language as a practice that is lacking in intellectual challenge. The same low opinion prevails in terms of description: it is viewed as an inferior, non-intellectual system of writing; at best, as a device that embellishes a narrative or sets a scene, with no intellectual value as a form on its own terms. This is a perception that Classicist D.P. Fowler, in his 1991 essay 'Narrate and Describe: the Problem of Ekphrasis' contests.

Of course, ekphrasis is particular in its focus on writing about art, and archival description is not. But although Fowler is writing about ekphrasis, he extends the discussion to the uses of description in literature outside of writing about works of art—including to the radical writing of the *Nouveau Roman*—and also to photography. His argument for the advancement of the form, and for his designation of description as ‘narrative pause’ (p. 25) (a concept explored in Chapter 4), is applicable to description of all kinds.

In archival image description, there is no room for the kind of poetic elaboration that we might find in traditional ekphrasis, the rendering of a work of art into words, written in order to somehow communicate the *essence* of the object as well as to define its physicality—and to knowingly create a new aesthetic object. Nor is there space for any purposeful probing of the relationship between text and image that Foucault provides in his ekphrastic delivery of Diego Velázquez’ 1656 painting *Las Meninas*, which forms the first chapter of his book *The Order of Things*. As Gary Shapiro argues, Foucault is ‘offering much more than a description of a painting; he proposes an analysis of the relationship between words and images, and so of the genre of ekphrasis itself’ (p. 13). Nonetheless, many of the tropes of archival description emerge in Foucault’s text, and he uses the piece to explain the methodologies of description: he argues that he is revealing the painting by the use of ‘grey, anonymous language, always over-meticulous and repetitive’ (2002a, p. 10); he stresses the irrelevance of character names, other than using them—if they are known—to identity positions and relationships, arguing, ‘the proper name, in this particular context, is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with’ (2002a, p. 10); and he describes methodically at times, concentrating on visual content, placing the figures in the painting in terms of spatial relationships to each other and to the boundaries of the painting:

The frieze that occupies the foreground and the middle ground of the picture represents—if we include the painter—eight characters. Five of these, their heads more or less bent, turned or inclined, are looking out at right angles to the surface of the picture. The centre of the group is occupied by the little infanta, with her flared pink and grey dress. The princess is turning her head towards the right side of the picture, while her torso and the big panniers of her dress slant away slightly towards the left; but her gaze is directed absolutely straight towards the spectator standing in front of the painting. A vertical line dividing the canvas into two equal halves would pass between the child’s eyes. Her face is a third of the total height of the picture above the lower frame. (ibid., p. 13)

Yet he deviates, not only to explain his own methods, but also to speculate on the scene and on the subject of the painting that is being painted inside the painting, depicted with only the back of the canvas on view. He concedes that 'all we can see of that canvas is its texture, the horizontal and vertical bars of the stretcher, and the obliquely rising foot of the easel'. But, in relation to this, he places the figures in the painting in a different way, as 'under the painter's gaze, towards the place where his brush will represent them'. (ibid., p. 6-7) *Las Meninas* is known to be a visually ambiguous painting and it has been analysed widely in terms of the relationship between reality and painterly illusion. Foucault is continuing this analysis, whilst exploring the relationship between what we see and how we write about what we see. *Las Meninas* is nonetheless a work that could be described in direct visual content terms, and it would be quite possible for such a description to expose the complexities and ambiguities of the situation depicted.

Cataloguing time is increasingly at a premium as far as archives are concerned. In cash-strapped institutions, object-level description is often reserved for the collections that are deemed most important, although it is still widely perceived by archive professionals as the zenith of cataloguing practices. Collections come into archives faster than it is possible to catalogue them and the problem has been exacerbated with the arrival of 'born-digital' collections. This was made clear to me in a recent visit to the Imperial War Museum Archive in London, where photographs from news media are in danger of flooding the system. Archive cataloguing and description are often outsourced or carried out in-house by lower paid non-professionals. In this climate, descriptions of the single image are often perceived as a problematic and unnecessary extravagance, one that originated before images were easily reproduced and shared as they are today.

In connection with this, Kari Kraus identifies two modes of comparison in terms of image and description: 'collocation', where the two objects are placed side by side, and 'collation', where they are separate. She links this to technical developments that have allowed ease of reproductions of images over time, allowing them to be placed in catalogues alongside their descriptions. She explains:

what becomes clear is that the relationship between collation and collocation fundamentally shifts over time. In the nineteenth century—prior to the rise of photomechanical reproduction—the descriptive catalog was generally devoid of images, and consequently *collocation* played little role in the presentation and analysis of variants. Instead, *description* and

*collation* combined to serve a substitutive function, standing in for the missing visual objects. (pp. 239-241 [original italics])

Although in today's image-rich environment descriptions might be considered as being past media forms that are no longer needed, they are more than mere anachronisms: extant descriptions remain and are used, and descriptions continue to be written when resources allow. In addition to continuing as a valuable offline resource in the paper catalogue, a description can successfully migrate into a searchable text in a broader online catalogue. In any case, contrary to popular expectations and all the discussion around *Archives 2.0*, we are still firmly in *Archives 1.0* territory, in terms of the economics of digitization: the self-maintaining 'living archive' of the Internet (Marquard Smith, p. 385) cannot be compared to the colossal and very physical task of digitization of archives that faces institutions that are often underfunded. Consequently, vast amounts of archive photographs are not accessible as images online but are often first encountered through text descriptions; the two different media forms, textual and visual, must endeavour to say the same thing—and no more than that. Description is therefore a text form that needs to be carefully managed.

## Variations in descriptive practices

It is accepted that two different archivists' descriptions of a photograph would never precisely match. Personal experiences, approaches, vocabularies and habits mean that small variations will always emerge. For instance, visual elements may be described in different orders and sometimes with different words. Standards have been laid down to manage description—and to an extent to de-personalize it—from the publication of *The Dutch Manual* in 1898, to the International Council on Archives' *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description* (2000), a document that sets out clear rules and guidelines for writing and organizing descriptions at every level. On top of this, individual institutions often develop specific rules of language and certain terms to be used above others. All these factors result in a curious fusion of the personal and the procedural. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young argues that 'what we call the human is always already an emergent product arising from the processual interaction of domains that in time are all too neatly divided up into technical and human' (p. 10). Archival description—and the techniques of the archives more generally—is only one example of this; human-system hybridity is present in many spheres

of life, through our ties to rules and technology in a work situation and, increasingly, in our social interactions.

Images are described not only with different words and phrases, but also with varying degrees of attention to detail. The following are examples of extremely short descriptions: photographs of the Ainu people of Japan, in an extract taken from the catalogue of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London:

[Ainu material]. [nd] [M249/1/19]

8 [Female child, seated portrait]. 1 photograph. 10 x 7.5 cm.

9 [Female child, seated portrait]. 1 photograph. 10 x 7.5 cm.

10 [Female child, seated portrait]. 1 photograph. 10 x 7.5 cm.

11 [Male, standing with back view]. Hair not as well seen on upper part of back, but more so below (loins). 1 photograph. 12 x 8 cm.

Compare these short descriptions to an image description from the Mountbatten Archive, University of Southampton Special Collections. In common with many in this particular Archive, this is a very detailed description. It is worth noting that although the description is heavily based on visual content, there is some known information, such as the names of some of the people present, which are given in the caption—although at times not very accurately, as the writer records with the addition of a question mark and an explanatory aside:

**#Docref=MB2/L3/147 Black and white photograph of Linda Cole Porter, ?Lesla Maxwell and Lady Louis Mountbatten on the Lido, Venice, c. August 1927-September 1927**

Black and white photograph of Linda Cole Porter, ?Lesla Maxwell and Lady Louis Mountbatten on the Lido, Venice. The photograph shows a group of five people, and the way in which the caption is written makes it unclear which of these people are ?Lesla Maxwell and Linda Cole Porter. The group is pictured in the shade of an awning which is suspended between the front of a beach hut and two wooden posts stuck in the sand. On the left of the photograph a young woman is sitting in a wooden chair; she is bending her head to read a book and her face is partially concealed by her hat. Next to her there is a large, older woman, wearing a beach robe. She is also sitting in a chair and is holding a book in one hand and a cigarette in the other. A little in front of her is a young woman. She is mostly concealed by a table in the foreground. She appears to be sitting on the sand but leaning against a wooden structure with cushions on it.



Lady Louis Mountbatten is sitting next to this woman. She is sitting on a cushion on the sand. A man is standing behind Lady Louis Mountbatten, leaning against one of the posts from which the awning is suspended. The table in the foreground is covered by a cloth and there are two cushions, with embroidered designs on their covers, on top of it. There is a row of beach huts, each with an awning at the front, and these stretch out behind the group, with tables and chairs arranged in the shade.

Although it is stated at the start of the description that this is a photograph of Lady Mountbatten (because of the context of the Archive as a whole) the description goes on to provide information from across the image, concerning the structure of awnings, designs of cushions—and the way people are holding their heads, how they are standing or sitting, and how they are concealed by certain objects at the point and angle of capture. The description emphasizes objects and human figures, not narratives, and these object-words are brought together with prepositions and other connecting words, in order to provide the situation with some spatial information and to make sense for the reader.

Given the need for the equalization of visual content, the order in which the components are described is notional and not of great importance. Victor Burgin discusses his earliest memory of an image from a film, which he calls a 'sequence-image' ('rather than an image sequence'); a still from the film burnt in his mind's eye. He states, 'The order in which they [the visual elements in the image] appear is insignificant (as in a rebus) and they present a configuration—"lexical, sporadic"—that is more "object" than narrative.' (2004, p. 21) He is referring to a recollection of an image rather than the observation of one that is physically present, but it is nevertheless about image description. In the archive too, elements of an image are not necessarily described in any particular order, and the order can vary between description writers, because they are not instructed to scan the image in a predetermined way, incrementally from left to right, or from top to bottom, for example. Rather, the order of things within the description is driven by the need to make sense within a prose form. In the Venice Lido description, we are introduced to the table, then the tablecloth that is on top of it, then the cushions on top of that, then the embroidery on the covers. This is not due to any hierarchical positioning of objects, but because that is how these elements in the image and the spatial connections between them are best recorded and understood.

Kraus, in analysing Charles Henry Middleton's exacting nineteenth-century catalogue description of a Rembrandt etching of Dr Faustus, explains

how, 'there is no such thing as noise in the visual system that may safely be disregarded [...] it is sins of *omission* that Middleton ultimately fears, rather than sins of *commission*'. (p. 245) This materializes as a clear methodology in the Venice Lido description. The description, following guidelines that reach back to the *Dutch Manual*, does not set out to anticipate future use, but to allow for all future uses, and this is the reason for the great attention to detail. After all, it is feasible that a researcher might not be interested in the Mountbattens at all, but perhaps in the history of the Venice Lido. In addition, the description provides a level of detail that allows the researcher to judge whether the photograph itself even needs to be seen: the description may deem it irrelevant, or the text itself might suffice for research purposes.

## Writing the inconclusive

Archival description, whether short or long, does not assign personal opinion to the objects with which it engages. Description that is based on intuition or speculation is unreliable; any information that is unsupported by the visual content or by definitive information gathered from elsewhere in the *fonds* is regarded as extraneous and problematic. The description writer needs to present a neutral view that is open enough to allow different research directions, but which presents and supports the position of the image as a record, as a site of evidence. This requirement has initiated some special use of language. This object-level catalogue description, again from the Mountbatten Archive (MB2/N14/113), describes a loose photograph. We know it is taken in India, but it is not part of an album, for example, so the contextual framework that such a container might provide is absent:

All of the Indian women wore white, and two had stethoscopes around their necks. There is, therefore, a possibility that this photograph was taken during a visit to a medical centre and that the white garments are uniforms.

Whilst we might consider it a certainty that this photograph is taken at a medical centre—given the stethoscopes and white garments—due to the lack of solid contextual information the description is inconclusive. The phrase 'there is a possibility' that is used here appears frequently in archival description, as does the phrase 'appears to be', which is written into the Venice Lido description above. These phrases offer informed speculation, with a refusal to commit outright to a point that is not definitively evidenced, either by the visual content or by the presence of upper level description.

The problems that emerge around the gathering of definitive evidence from an isolated photograph come to light in the work of Canadian photographer Jeff Wall. He offers up apparently clear scenarios, but in his photographs (except for his documentary landscapes), the scenes are precisely constructed ones; they are fabricated, or at least partially fabricated. Writing about his photograph *Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* (1999), Wall explains his way of working:

The man in the picture is the real cleaner. The picture is documentary in the sense that that's exactly what he would be doing at that moment of the day. It's what I call 'near documentary'. Although I arranged the picture and worked in collaboration with the cleaner, the picture resembles very closely what a snapshot made at that moment would show. (Quoted in Newman, p. 9)

As exhibition images are often not available for reproduction, press releases, routinely supplied by galleries for their exhibitions, are generally text only documents and are therefore heavy on description. However, the language used in the descriptions of Wall's work in the press release for his exhibition at the White Cube gallery, London (November 2011- January 2012) becomes significant in the light of his methods:

In the lower ground-floor gallery, Wall will show, together for the first time, seven photographs that each feature a figure, or group of figures, many who appear to be playing or enacting a particular role. In *Band and crowd* (2011) a trio plays their drums and guitars with fervent intensity to a sparse, partly disengaged, crowd, while in *Boxing* (2011) two boys exchange blows in amid the measured calm of a middle-class living room. *Young man wet with rain* (2011) depicts a figure caught in a moment of thought while seeking shelter from a rain shower, countless droplets clinging to his coat. (2011)

There is little or no attempt in these descriptions to contextualize the pictures, because there *is* no real context; neither is there any link between the images described that might give us a clue to their wider meaning. Accordingly, these descriptions have much in common with archival ones, and the use of the phrase 'appear to be' establishes both the uncertainty of the images and the fact that we are dealing with the direct appearance of the photographs. We might consider it apt to preface all visual content descriptions with words such as these.



Figure 3.3 'Two Boys Boxing', From Carmen Kilner's Album, part of The Basque Children of '37 Archive.

Courtesy of Carmen Kilner.

The snapshot of 'Two Boys Boxing' (Figure 3.3), taken from The Basque Children of '37 Archive, falls loosely into Wall's classification of 'near documentary': these are real Basque refugee children; they played sport (two facts corroborated by other objects in the Archive); they would probably have boxed (they have the equipment); and this could be taking place within a real boxing session. Yet it seems apparent from their stances and their expressions that they are posing for the camera, and we might consider the caption to be not entirely correct. In Wall's carefully constructed *Boxing* photograph, described in the press release above, there is no apparent posing, no eyes turned towards the camera; there is no concrete visual evidence that this is not a real situation, albeit an unusual one, in which case the caption fits.

## Reading the image

The idea of the multiplicity of uses of an archive object, where the specific intentions of future readers are not considered as part of the cataloguing process, has confluence with Walter Benjamin's notion, in his 1923 essay 'The Task of the Translator', of the 'consideration of the receiver', in translation and in other forms of writing. Benjamin argues against any assumptions

about the nature of the reader and argues that harbouring a concept of the ideal reader is detrimental to the writing of the text (1999, p. 70). In order for description to be open and understood by as wide a range of readers as is possible, the primary currency of archival description is explicit knowledge, although some tacit knowledge must also be assumed. For example, one must accept common knowledge of the existence of objects such as tables, tablecloths, cushions and embroidery that occur in the Venice Lido description, as well as their general significance in the world.

Burgin argues that because he has seen photographs since he was a child, he has no problem, for example, interpreting 'irregular regular patches of light and dark tones as representing stones', and he notes that when 'African Bushmen' were first shown photographs they had to be taught to read them (1997, p. 79). If we were not willing to assume a basic knowledge of objects—and of the operational and communicative nature of the photograph itself, its status as something other than a presentation of 'visual noise' (ibid.)—description would need to be rendered into a reductive notation of shape and tone, or shape and colour. This is exactly what Kenneth Goldsmith does in his description of Ellsworth Kelly's 1951 abstract painting *Seine*, culminating in the publication *Seine (after Ellsworth Kelly)* in 2016. This is a lengthy project that draws on an extremely limited vocabulary. Kelly's painting is itself made up of reductive notations of shape and colour, and the limitations in language (restricted to index numbers, measurements, colours, locations) directly match the limitations of the visual elements, making Goldsmith's piece a sound example of image to text transfer. In order to describe *Seine*, Goldsmith is indeed systematically scanning and recording the painting from one side to the next, in increments as small as one sixteenth of an inch.

Erwin Panofsky, in his text on iconology, cites three strata of subject matter or meaning contained in an image: *primary*, where the viewer must have a 'familiarity with objects and events', *secondary* or *conventional*, where a 'familiarity with specific themes and concepts' is needed, and *intrinsic*, where one would require a 'familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind'. (pp. 3-17) Roland Barthes also puts forward three levels of meaning: firstly, the *informational*, or *communication*, 'which gathers together everything I can learn from the setting', secondly, the *symbolic*, *signification*, or the *obvious*, 'a second or neo-semiotics, open no longer to the science of the message but to the sciences of the symbol', and thirdly, *significance*, or the *obtuse*, a meaning which extends 'outside culture, knowledge, information'. (1977, pp. 52-55) Whilst Panofsky and Barthes' three levels might differ slightly in their focus, they both communicate

escalating levels of knowledge and cultural understanding, and the writing and the reception of description can be measured against them. Visual content-based description deals almost exclusively with the *primary* and *informational*, (familiarity, information gathering). It could perhaps stray into Panofsky's *secondary* but it stops short of Barthes' *symbolic* and the third levels of Panofsky's *intrinsic* and Barthes' *significance* or *obtusé*, a level which takes us outside of the realms of cultural knowledge altogether.

Continuing her discussion on the hidden and the visible image, Kraus places the catalogue description of Rembrandt's etching of Dr Faustus within Panofsky's three levels at the first (pre-iconographic) level, as 'a literal interpretation of pictorial content'. She provides the catalogue entry, and we can see from the last sentence that the understanding of the description is dependent on the reader's familiarity with objects and events: 'Lower down, on the right, a pile of books lies on the table, and below, in the right corner, is the upper half of a globe. In the left background are a shelf of books, an hour glass, a skull, etc., while many sheets of paper fastened together hang by the upper part of the casement.' The etching itself may be heavy on symbolism and the reader could recognize the symbolic nature of the skull, the hourglass and the globe from the description, but this is not a pre-condition of the description itself. Kraus goes on to compare this description to a catalogue description of the same image made a hundred years later, included as a supplement to a photographic reproduction of the print, and containing no pre-iconographic information at all (pp. 241-242).

The pre-iconographic model of description, although often deemed unnecessary in a world where images are easily reproducible, operates effectively within contemporary photographic critique, where the materiality and technicity of the image take on new importance and arguments around interpretation and signification are perceived as less urgent. However, the description is wholly able to parallel the image in terms of polysemy and ambiguity of meaning, both of which are to some extent necessary in order to preserve the openness of the description and its availability to different strands of inquiry. D.P. Fowler suggests that the two different media operate in much the same way in this respect and are influenced by the same outside forces, the same cultural constructs. These remarks are made in the context of the ambiguity written in relation to a literary description of a narrative painting, an art form that Fowler himself argues can incorporate more than one moment in time and might not necessarily be an accurate representation of reality (pp. 29-30). But even within the direct and restricted language of archival image description, there

is always potential for ambiguity, just as there is within the image itself. Image description is the lexical equivalent of a photographic capture as it simply deals with what is there, yet at the same time it must be accepted that the description, by its very nature, is a participatory object. Speculation and conjecture are perhaps undesirable in archival terms, but they are inevitable consequences of reader participation, especially within an open description. Visual ambiguity needs to be preserved through description, and the non-committal, institutional language form may even invite the imagination to wander—even more than it would if the image itself was being viewed. Whilst description writing, as we have seen, lies within Panofsky's second level of meaning—'a familiarity with specific themes and concepts'—accumulated and shared knowledge amongst different audiences might cause the *reading* to stray into the third level, a 'familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind'. (pp. 3-17)

Burgin uses the term 'completion' to explain the process of interpretation and deduction by the reader of texts *or* the viewer of artworks. Throughout his career, Burgin has worked across a variety of forms of visual representation, and with a strong linguistic presence. He uses language in a typically restrained and carefully constructed way, alluding to events and notions that often lie outside of the immediate time and space of the images put forward. Of late, Burgin's work often takes the form of looped films and static text panels, which are not interactive at all in terms of the audience's ability to control their presentation. He suggests (2011, p. 200) that Marshall McLuhan's approach to 'cool media', demanding high levels of participation and completion by the audience (McLuhan, p. 22), might be a viable alternative to what is now thought of as interactivity. Yet, fully acknowledging the complexities of completion, Burgin begins his book *The Remembered Film* with a Wittgenstein quote, which concludes, 'If you complete it you falsify it.' (2004, p. 7) This is an expedient warning for description writers and readers alike.

## The limits of vocabularies

Paper catalogues, lists and descriptions are traditional finding aids that originate from an era before the computerization of archives, and whilst the shelf, box and file system of physical ordering systems may not have seen much change, the rules on language for archival description have become—and are becoming—increasingly structured. The standardization and automation of records, and the linked digitization of certain collections, take objects out of the boundaries of specific institutions

through the addition of metadata. Metadata is a text form that enables the organization and control of computerized and networked record systems generally, and it is central to the structure and the operation of the digital and networked archive. Metadata can provide descriptive, structural or administrative information, and in archives all three types are applied. Formerly known as the Joint Information Systems Committee, the organization Jisc<sup>5</sup> uses the often-cited definition of metadata as ‘data about data’, adding also that descriptive metadata is ‘usually structured textual information’.

In the context of a full archival description that is networked—or even might be in the future—the term ‘metadata’ is usually perceived by archivists as extra information that operates independently and differently to the description itself. Whilst image description fits the Jisc definition of descriptive metadata as data about data, and provision is even made for free text description as metadata,<sup>6</sup> description is something more: it is *equivalent* to the data (the photograph) rather than simply being *about* it. Significantly, when extant descriptions are reassigned into searchable texts online, they work positively outside of the limitations of vocabularies and predefined thesaurus terms, which are built into metadata schemas and form the backbone of many digitized and networked archives. The use of schemas for description allows the addition of pre-defined textual information to an image; this is a relatively quick and easy procedure and so the cataloguing expertise and levels of decision-making that is needed for full image description is circumvented. Although advocates of schemas would argue that the main aim is to enable a machine search and retrieval process and to increase operability across collections, the standardization of archival practices for the digital age would fulfil Dewey’s objective to save time through uniformity of cataloguing (Krajewski, p. 90). The time saving nature of such standardization is clearly a consideration in the context of overstretched and underfunded institutions.

Thesaurus sets are downloadable: general ones from organizations such as UNESCO or the Library of Congress, and subject focused sets from specialist providers. If an institution with a particular specialism needs to create its own set of thesaurus terms, then there are country-specific and international guidelines to help with this. But even specialist and tailored schema can

5 Jisc is a UK based non-profit company that was established in 1993 in order to provide digital resources and advice on networks and technologies to education and research institutions. It is mainly funded by the UK further and higher education funding bodies.

6 See <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/metadata/describing-metadata> [Accessed 13 July 2018]



be too restricted for most projects to use rationally. Although they can be adapted to a certain extent, limitations exist in the form of numerous data entry rules and formalities of language that need to be observed, in order to preserve interoperability across different collections and institutions. On its website, Jisc terms metadata as ‘the glue which links information and data across the world wide web’. In order for this to work, it is in the remit of metadata schemas to remain limited in terms of their vocabularies.

There are in existence many specialized schemas and publicly available tools designed specifically for describing images, including Getty Vocabularies from the Getty Institute<sup>7</sup>, which are used widely within major institutions for cataloguing art, architecture and material culture. The Visual Resources Association's VRA Core is also used extensively to catalogue art images and images of cultural objects. VRA ‘makes a distinction between information relating to (1) the original artwork and (2) images of that artwork’. (Jisc Digital Media, p. 19). This seems a simple enough concept, but it is critical to the management of fine art photographs, because it involves specific dialogue on issues of object, intermediary, authorship and ownership. SEPIADES, initiated by the organization SEPIA (Safeguarding European Photographic Images for Access) in 2003, is a metadata schema specifically designed for describing photographic collections. Jisc Digital Media (p. 36) provide an explanation of how SEPIADES works:

In common with many other schema, SEPIADES supports multi-level description, enabling cataloguing at different levels: Collection, Grouping, Single Item—or all at once in the same cataloguing record. A SEPIADES record also records information about the Institution and the Acquisition (i.e. the means by which the material came into the institution). Each of these five sets of information (Institution, Acquisition, Collection, Grouping, Single Item) are further sub-divided into Administration (for administrative metadata), Provenance (for historical or contextual metadata), and Material (for descriptive metadata). At the single Item Level a ‘Material’ distinction is made between the Visual Image (i.e. its visual content) and the Physical Description (its physical form). The Physical Description is further divided up into Photographs and Digital Images.

These technical guidelines are very similar to those put forward for general archival description by the International Council on Archives; the change

7 See <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/lod/index.html> [Accessed 21 Feb 2019]

that has taken place is not in terms of the basic parameters of levels of description, but in the operational strategies of schemas. The use of schemas actively encourages description at group level—this often happens in the paper catalogue too, as has been mentioned, and is clearly a time saving strategy. The difference is that this is quite manageable in the physical archive, where description may stop at group level and the researcher would in that case need to look through a folder or two of material instead of being directed to a specific object. But inside the network it is more problematic, as objects are discoverable not through visible hierarchies of description, but by way of a broad keyword that is not only applied to other images of the same event, but also to images of other events that are not directly connected. Ariella Azoulay considers the problems of ‘event-based’ description for the researcher:

In the press, and in archives in general, photographs are shown and stored as reference to an event, and are henceforth brought out and replicated time and time again in the simple and problematic signifying relations attested to by the language of captions common in archives, like ‘refugees’, ‘expulsion’, or ‘torture’. [...] This tagging mask is perceived as a would-be factual description or a broad common denominator of what different people might see in a photograph. (p. 10)

And as Stephen Connor observed in a talk given to the Friends of the University of London Library in 2002, ‘the keyword search can easily shrink into a kind of keyhole surgery, in which what you get out is too narrowly prescribed by what you put in. [...] You need to know not only the kinds of words that others have used to designate your topic but the lexical and intellectual company those words have kept.’ (n.p.) So the search term is twice removed from the object it describes: firstly by the choice of keyword applied; secondly, it is curtailed by the inherent narrowness of a single word descriptor that may be entirely interchangeable with other words that are not available within the limits of the vocabulary used. With the influx of born digital images, Azoulay’s ‘common denominator’ becomes even broader as it must be able to accommodate both a profusion and a diversity of materials; the keyword must expand in capacity but with no extension in meaning.

Metadata carries the credible authority of the list: it comes from a thesaurus list and then *forms* a list of attached keywords—and it is especially convincing when positioned within the bureaucratic space of the institution. It also operates inside the culture of keyword-based searching, so it is widely

recognized. Yet this method of cataloguing is narrow and can result in poor accuracy in terms of search results, as Azoulay and Connor both observe. Interoperability itself can be superficial and flawed: although objects or images can be linked over archives and institutions by the same word, this word, part of a limited vocabulary as it is, may struggle as a shared descriptor. Thus, metadata schemas become deficient in their primary role: that of finding aid. Like the user-generated tag, thesaurus terms create and populate their own spaces of meaning and construct contextual connections that in many cases are irrelevant. Archive media and social media grow closer together as interoperability is perceived as key to the visibility of digital objects.

## Works cited

- Azoulay, A. (2010). What is a Photograph? What is Photography? *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 9-13.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico.
- Burgin, V. (1997). Art, Common Sense and Photography. In J. Evans (Ed.), *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography* (pp. 75-85). London: Rivers Oram Press.
- Burgin, V. (2004). *The Remembered Film*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Burgin, V. (2011). *Parallel Texts: Interviews and Interventions about Art*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Connor, S. (2002). *Sleights of Voice: Ventriloquism, Magic and the Harry Price Collection*. Available at: <http://stevenconnor.com/hpc.html> [Accessed 19 July 2018]
- Cook, T. (2001). Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts. *Archival Science*, 1, 3-24.
- Ellis, J. (1993). *Keeping Archives*. Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: D. W. Thorpe.
- Ernst, W. (2013). *Digital Memory and the Archive*. Edited and with an introduction by J. Parikka. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Ernst, W. (2016). Radically De-historicising the Archive. Decolonising Archival Memory from the Supremacy of Historical Discourse. In *Decolonising Archives* (pp. 9-16). L'Internationale Online.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2002a). *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.
- Fowler, D.P. (1991). Narrate and Describe: the Problem of Ekphrasis. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 81, 25-35.

- Goldsmith, K. (2016). *Seine (after Ellsworth Kelly)*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Highmore, B. (2012). Listlessness in the Archive. *M/C Journal*, 15 [Online]. Available at: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/546> [Accessed 26 June 2018]
- Hohmann, P. (2016). Archival Appraisal, Jenkinson, Schellenberg, Archival Bond, Impartiality. *The American Archivist*, Vol. 79, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2016, 14-25.
- Hood, C.C. & Margetts, H.Z. (2007). *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- International Council on Archives (2000). *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*. 2nd ed. Ottawa: International Council on Archives.
- Jenkinson, H. (1937). *A Manual of Archive Administration*. London: P. Lund, Humphries & co., ltd.
- Jisc Digital Media (2009). *Introduction to Image Metadata*. (Jisc Course Material).
- Ketelaar, E. (1996). Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual. *Archivaria*, 41, 31-40.
- Krajewski, M. (2011). *Paper Machines: About Cards and Catalogs, 1548-1929*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Kraus, K. (2013). Picture Criticism: Textual Studies and the Image. In N. Fraistat and J. Flanders (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship* (pp. 236-256). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Macho, T. (2003). Zeit und Zahl. Kalender und Zeitrechnung als Kulturtechniken. In S. Krämer & H. Bredekamp (Eds.), *Bild—Schrift—Zahl*, (pp. 179-192). München: Wilhelm Fink.
- Magnani, G. (1990). Ordering Procedures: Photography in Recent German Art. *Arts Magazine*, 64, 78-83.
- McLuhan, M. (1987). *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. London: Ark Paperbacks.
- Panofsky, E. (1962). *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Shapiro, G. (2007). The Absent Image: Ekphrasis and the 'Infinite Relation' of Translation. *Journal of Visual Culture* 6(1), 13-24.
- Siebert, B. (2013). Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory. *Theory, Culture and Society* 30(6), 48-65.
- Siebert, B. (2015). *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Smith, M. (2013). Theses on the Philosophy of History: the Work of Research in the Age of Digital Searchability and Distributability. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 12 (3), 375-403.
- Vestberg, N.L. (2013). Ordering, Searching, Finding. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 12, 472-489.

- Vinay, J.-P. & Darbelnet, J. (2000). A Methodology for Translation. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader* (pp. 84-93). New York: Routledge.
- Vismann, C. (2008). *Files: Law, Media and Technology*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Wilss, W. (1996). *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behaviour*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Winthrop-Young, G. (2013). Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks. *Theory Culture & Society*, 30(6), 3-19.
- Young, L.C. (2014). On Lists and Networks: an Archaeology of Form. *Amodern* 2 [Online]. Available at: <http://amodern.net/article/on-lists-and-networks/> [Accessed 19 July 2018]
- Young, L.C. (2017). *List Cultures: Knowledge and Poetics from Mesopotamia to Buzzfeed*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

## 4 The archiving camera

### Abstract

Chapter four assesses the camera's persistence as a tool for archivization. Underpinning this is the notion of photographic registration: discrete image time is recorded by the shutter, and is inherent in description, which mirrors the camera's freezing of time. Description is framed as 'narrative pause', and the photograph as a technical pause in the narrative. Descriptions of an image set are provided, and they are further examined through a filmic gaze, as original order presents flashbacks, jump cuts and close shots. Lastly, the temporal status of the archive copy is considered, with the digitization of photographs framed as a second moment of registration and archivization that has major implications for the status and even the survival of the original object.

**Keywords:** digitization; duration; film; image capture; narrative; temporality

As outlined in the first chapter of this book, the development of photography ran alongside developments in scientific investigation. In many cases photography was a means of facilitating developments in the sciences, rather than simply documenting them. The general public embraced photography as part of a growing curiosity about a world that was rapidly and tantalizingly becoming more known—and it seemed to involve the camera at every turn. Following from its early use as a tool of scientific and anthropological investigation—and of socialization—the camera, in its many forms and formats, functions today as a collector and collator of immeasurable amounts of data, both visual and textual. It is a prolific archiving machine, throwing out images and metadata at a furious rate. In January 2019, it was reported in *Wired* magazine that more than a trillion photographs were being taken each year.<sup>1</sup> This figure is based on photographs taken

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.wired.com/story/tech-effects-photography-impacts/> [Accessed 21-02-19].

by people and so excludes those generated by security and surveillance cameras, the vast majority of which remain unseen by human eye and are mostly unquantifiable.

John Tagg argues: 'At the very time of photography's technical development, the functions of the state were expanding and diversifying in forms that were both more visible and more rigorous.' Additionally, he perceives the new powers of the state as affording photography the 'power to evoke truth' (p. 61). The combination of state power and photography in the case of Bertillon's Paris Police Archive photographs of 'criminal types', for example, is apparent. Although today truth may be at stake in terms of photographic manipulation, 'fake news' and corruption of government (have not these always been considerations?), it is apparent that photographic technologies, and non-human ones in particular, have increased in parallel with our growing culture of surveillance. The accurate recording of time and place is a critical factor in terms of photographic evidence produced and archived within this culture. In order to investigate the inner archiving potential of the camera that exists within, but also above and beyond, the social and administrative sites of mass photographic accumulation and storage, the photographic image must be defined and explored as a complex technical form of spatiotemporal registration.

The archive is a site of historical preservation, of protection against time, yet it operates always in the present, as does the photographic image as it is presented to us, whether on a gallery wall, in an album, or online. In common with the archive institution, the reach of the photograph is *beyond* time. Although these things must be considered cautiously in the context of the photograph's inherent predisposition to degradation over time, the photographic image can be perceived as an apt metaphor for the static nature of the archive as a whole, as it freezes and indexes time in a way that parallels archival ideals of stability: the preservation, description and storage of units of information for future use. The cataloguing and description of images in the archive exposes through its language the temporal complexities of stored images and image sets; it also allows us to understand image *as* description.

## The narrative pause

The 'narrative pause' is a term from narrative theory that I adopt here to define the pause in time that the camera affords. The photograph represents a pause in time—mostly the embodiment of a very short duration—that it is calculated to describe and preserve. In narrative theory, narrative

pause generally refers to a set-piece description that is placed within a narrative. D.P. Fowler defines it as 'a passage at the level of narration to which nothing corresponds at the level of story. The plot does not advance, but something is described'. Fowler argues that it is impossible for a narrative of any length to be devoid of description and he acknowledges the part it plays in setting the scene: 'Description is admitted to be narratively (or indeed thematically) redundant, this redundancy increases our sense of reality of the scene before us. It is just as if we were there ourselves.' (pp. 25-26). Fowler's title, 'Narrate and Describe: the Problem of Ekphrasis' makes direct reference to Georg Lukács' 1936 essay 'Narrate or Describe?' which argues the shortcomings of description when compared with narration. Cannon Schmitt, in a critique of this essay, contests Lukács' argument, which he perceives as being that 'certain words in the pages of a novel are not actually pertinent to its meaning—to its narration or interpretation—because they are simply descriptive'. In order to ratify his argument, Schmitt provides an example from Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road*, where the contents of a toolbox are described in detail (Schmitt, pp.109-112). Similarly, Roland Barthes' in his essay, 'The Reality Effect', written in 1968, emphasizes the importance of detail and description, which, although it may seem superfluous to the narrative, adds to the reality of it. He gives the example of Flaubert's description of a piano 'as an indication of its owner's bourgeois standing' (1989, p. 142). All these definitions are apposite to the way that a camera records—and the archive catalogue describes—a situation and not a narrative. The observations from Fowler, Schmitt and Barthes are significant in the way they define the description of *things* as a key to the setting of a scene.

Wolfgang Ernst argues that '*Description* is at odds with the narrative'; that it 'remains exterior to the essence of things—by virtue of the archaeological (instead of the historicizing) gaze'. (2013, p. 153, [original italics]) Schmitt, although he acknowledges the difference between the two forms, makes the case that we can both narrate *and* describe, that the two can work together and enhance each other. He argues that descriptive passages, such as the one he cites from *The Road*, can be essential to the outcome of the plot. Objects (the toolbox itself, a torch, a strobe beacon, a first aid kit, a flare pistol in its own box) dominate this passage, and these objects are recorded in a very unambiguous way. The listing of these items generates a certain kind of knowledge that, as Schmitt argues, serves 'to lessen the distance between readers and characters'. (pp. 106-110) Barthes' three levels of meaning contained in an image are discussed in Chapter 3, but it is apt here to refer back to Barthes: his first level is defined as one of detection



and of knowledge-building, as it 'gathers together everything I can learn from the setting'. (1977, pp. 52-55)

In the early days of photography—and ever since, in terms of the photograph as document (archival, scientific or otherwise)—the indexical nature of the image, the presentation of Fowler's 'reality of the scene before us' (p. 26) is a critical factor, and one that archival description attempts to convey with its objectivity of language and its attention to all things visible in the frame. Fowler subsequently remarks on the correspondence between camera and language in a description by novelist Leonardo Sciascia (from his 1987 work *1912+1*),<sup>2</sup> where he describes a harrowing photograph of an Arab being shot amongst the dunes during the Italian imperialist war in Libya. The description itself is very short, just a single sentence. As noted in Chapter 2, regarding Sekula's *Meditations on a Triptych*, the description it is set within, and as a foil to, an emotive narrative:

In Cyrenaica the guerrilla war was causing irritation. Courts martial were in constant session to pass judgement on the rebels—that is, to hand them over to the firing squads. A few images of this reached the Italian public: sketches, photographs. What was their feeling when they looked at this photograph before me, depicting the shooting of an arab [sic] in the midst of dunes? The platoon lined up in two lines, the officer waiting to give the order to fire, the condemned man looking a long way from the firing squad, almost lost in the undulating dunes. August 1913. 1912 +1. (D.P. Fowler, p. 29)

In this context, Fowler argues that neutral description is almost impossible: 'The same photograph can be read as a sign of triumph or an indictment of crime, but verbal description has to take a stand, however 'objective' it might be [...] there is an obvious sense in which description in language inscribes a point of view more forcefully and more unambiguously than plastic art'. Nonetheless, Fowler remarks that 'Sciascia attempts to describe the scene neutrally, like a camera with the shutter open'. (p. 29) This is a revealing observation on the way that the camera functions as an apparatus of description and archivization, one that yields a technical narrative pause directly through the mechanics (or electronics) of the shutter. The description

2 The excerpt provided here from Leonardo Sciascia's book *1912 + 1* is, I believe, Fowler's own translation from the original Italian that he also provides in his article. Available imprints of *1912 + 1* include the Italian language (9<sup>th</sup>) edition (Milan: Adelphi, 1986), the English language edition (Manchester: Carcanet, 1989) and also the French language edition (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

of an image is of course an unconditional example of narrative pause: it parallels the camera shutter as it commits the capture and embodiment of a moment in time to text. There is no time within still images except for the fraction of a second that the shutter is open. Description captures the time depicted, and no more than that.

In order to elucidate here, I use a short extract from a description of my own, of a photograph entitled *Patrons-watch-an-activist-004.jpg*.<sup>3</sup> The *Patrons* description is an extended, set-piece description (around 1300 words) produced in 2014 as part of my archive-related art practice, and it has been delivered as a lecture performance. The original photograph is a journalistic one, a small jpeg image found online and now managed by Reuters. The documentary status of the image intensifies the notion of narrative pause: there is a story to tell here, but we do not know from the content of the image exactly what the story is. There are no supporting materials available, no sense of part-to-whole relationship that might add context, duration or temporal progression. We have only the short title to aid our understanding of the image. Like Sekula, in his descriptions of the Hine and Stieglitz photographs (1982, 88), for the purposes of this project I chose to divest the image of any context. The description is far longer than one made in the archive, as it was created outside of the time/labour limitations of the institution. What is important here is that the writing of this description—set within the space of practice-oriented knowledge production—provided me with an opportunity to work within the restrictions and the tropes of content-based description, and at the same time to explore in detail the embodied time of the image:

This is a photograph of the interior of a cafeteria or restaurant, viewed from the outside. It is night and it is darker on the outside than on the inside of the restaurant. We are looking at the interior scene through a plate glass window or door and we know this because we can see reflections on the glass. These are mostly indistinct, but we can just make out the reflections of the heads and shoulders of a group of people at the left side of the photograph. The interior of the restaurant, seen through the glass, takes up approximately two thirds of the frame on the left side of the image. The remaining third of the photograph is filled almost entirely by the figure of a man standing in the foreground, just on the outside of

3 This is the metadata that came with the photograph: 'Headline: Patrons watch an activist banging on the window of McDonald's in Los Angeles. Credit: Mario Anzuoni. Source: Reuters.' All links to this image seem now to be lost.

the restaurant and close to the window or door. His left arm is raised in an act of gesticulation and he seems to be waving or possibly banging on the window or door with his hand. His arm and hand are blurred, probably due to movement and the slow shutter speed of the camera in the limited available light. Just behind him, and obscured by him apart from one bare arm, is a second person. This isolated arm is raised in a similar fashion and at a similar angle to the first man's, so that the two arms configure as parallel forms. The man in the foreground is black and he is thick set. He is smartly dressed, with a bright blue shirt cuff protruding from underneath a dark blue or black jacket. He is wearing a white trilby style of hat, with a black band that can only just be seen due to the angle of the camera, which is situated somewhat lower than the man's head. He is wearing spectacles and the light of the restaurant is reflecting in the lens that is on view, which is the left hand lens. His mouth is open wide, either in a gesture of surprise, or as if he is shouting. A gold ring, possibly a wedding ring, is visible on his left hand and it is catching the light and glinting brightly against the dark skin of his hand.

This discrete description connects us back to the moment of capture in a number of ways. The beginning of the description is unambiguous and sets the scene: 'This is a photograph of the interior of a cafeteria or restaurant, viewed from the outside.' And the image is broken into zones that make it clear that the scene is constrained by the photographic frame: 'The interior of the restaurant, seen through the glass, takes up approximately two thirds of the frame on the left side of the image. The remaining third of the photograph is filled almost entirely by the figure of a man standing in the foreground, just on the outside of the restaurant and close to the window or door.' The text makes direct reference to the camera, with the 'slow shutter speed of the camera in the limited available light', and then, 'a white trilby style of hat, with a black band that can only just be seen due to the angle of the camera'. And without any mention of the camera, the instant of capture is delineated by the description of the man's wedding ring 'catching the light and glinting brightly'. This is a momentary occurrence, one easily missed in real time, but preserved—archived—by the camera, and in this case by the subsequent description. It is a discrete description of a 'snapshot' moment, indeed, in the milieu of archival description, all photographic images, whether fine art photographs, documentary or vernacular images, are treated as snapshots, discrete moments captured and described.

Description affords an understanding of the moment of photographic capture as a descriptive act in its own right; the image depicts things—and

sometimes people—and the spatial relationships *between* the things and the people that are caught in the frame at this particular moment. These spatial relationships themselves reveal the time criticality of the image. For example, the description of the momentary configuration of the two men's arms: 'This isolated arm is raised in a similar fashion and at a similar angle to the first man's, so that the two arms configure as parallel forms.' We can deduce that in real time the two arms are moving, but here they are held in stasis, preserved for the future and thereby analogous to the temporal complexities of the archive itself.

In Sekula's *Meditations on a Triptych* text (1973-1978), which has already been explored in the context of the snapshot image in Chapter 2, we see overt and very descriptive references to the camera and to the moment of capture. (As in Chapter 2, all the quotes from Sekula's *Meditations* text are taken from his 1984 exhibition publication, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983*, page range 168-174.) He writes on the first image: 'Perspective is exaggerated. The man tends, slightly, to belong to the foreground. The woman begins to belong to the background. This might be merely an unmotivated optical effect.' And then, again remarking on the optics of the camera used: 'The building appears to bow inward at the middle, as though it were sagging towards its eventual collapse. All the vertical lines in the photograph are distorted in this fashion. This is merely evidence that an inexpensive camera with a poor lens was used to make the picture.' We read in relation to the second image: 'She faces the camera directly. He stands, his body turned toward her as it casts a shadow over her left side. His hips, shoulders and head are turned in different directions, with his gaze directed toward the lens.' Then, with the third and final image we are made aware both of the camera and the physical space and the materiality of the photograph itself: 'The three figures face the camera in front of a narrow strip of shabby grass [...] the middle of the image is traversed horizontally by a line of white lilies and a line of white bonnets.'

Such references to photographer, camera, angle and capture also appear within institutional cataloguing. This is a description taken once again from the Mountbatten Archive, in the University of Southampton's Special Collections:

**#Docref=MB2/L4/155 Black and white photograph of the Countess of Brecknock sitting at a table outside a building in Madrid, c. April 1928.** Black and white photograph of the Countess of Brecknock sitting at a table outside a building in Madrid. There are three chairs around the table. On the chair beside the Countess of Brecknock there is a cloak

and a handbag. All the furniture is made of cane. On the table there are a handbag, a coffee pot, cups and a milk jug. The building immediately behind the Countess of Brecknock is only very partially pictured. The walls are of large blocks of stone and there is a window at street level, the outside of which is protected by a metal grille. Only the sill of the window above is visible. The shadow of the photographer, probably Lady Louis Mountbatten, is cast on the ground in the foreground of the photograph.

The mention of the shadow of the photographer echoes that in Sekula's text, where it is positioned as a 'negative trace [...] outside the frame'. In both cases the photographer, represented by the intrusion of a shadow, is an important player in the scene: here it is Lady Mountbatten, and in the *Meditations* text it is Sekula himself. In both cases we might need to say 'probably' because the two are by default not depicted, yet the two photographs record the both scene and the photographer's position at the moment the photograph is made. In Sekula's text it is purposefully mentioned in the context of imperfect photograph, but also as a pointer to the act of capture. In the Mountbatten description it points to the likely presence of Lady Mountbatten, an opinion that is perhaps formed by seeing other photos taken on the same day.

## Inside and outside of image time

As I have previously pointed out, Sekula's *Meditations* text repeatedly takes us out of the time of the three photographs and into the realms of memory and extreme speculation, and this only serves to intensify the static time of the image, and the time of image in the present, which—in case we forget this fact amidst Sekula's various travels in time—he articulates just a few lines into the text: 'Since this is a still photograph, the man and the woman are still standing' (1984, 168). Without any added text, and with titles that are not contextually helpful, many of Jeff Wall's fabricated photographic situations constitute an exploration of the inherent and discrete temporality of the still image. Michael Newman states that 'Wall works by recreation rather than snapshot' (p. 69). But although the recreation is controlled and time heavy in its production, the photograph still records a fleeting moment. This is made very evident, for example, in Wall's familiar piece *Milk*, from 1984, a photograph of a man sitting with his back against a brick wall, squashing a carton of milk in his hand and thereby causing the milk

to splash and fly upwards into the air. This is an image heavily reliant for its success on a controlled use of shutter time to capture a discrete situation, yet it consciously encourages the viewer to explore a timespan and a story *outside* of the moment of capture, not only in terms of the man's state of mind and what he is doing there, but in very practical terms: we know for sure that the milk spillage will not stop after the shutter is closed, and this is once again all down to our shared experiences and systems of knowledge, Panofsky's 'familiarity with objects and events' (pp. 3-17). Newman argues in relation to Wall's work: 'a still image can be temporally extremely complex. It is temporalized in the viewer's perceptual and intellectual experience [...] The phenomenological experience of the stillness of the image is affected both by the duration embodied in that image, and by the possibility—or not—of movement.' (p. 70)

The duration 'embodied' in an image can vary; our everyday snapshots now tend to be taken with a shutter speed of a fraction of a second. In the early days of photography, the duration of the shot was long, resulting in visible movement inside the image. Or perhaps not, if it could be avoided, as in the case of Daguerre's famous image of the *Boulevard du Temple*, which features in the distance a Parisian shoe-shine and his client, famous because it is believed to be the first photograph to show a living person. It is argued that the subjects, by dint of their activity, stayed still long enough for them to become imprinted on the photographic plate. Howard Caygill, in his talk at the Architectural Association<sup>4</sup>, is skeptical of this explanation: Daguerre would have had to use a long exposure (between ten and thirty-five minutes, according to Caygill), far longer than it takes to shine a pair of shoes. Whether or not the shoes are actually being shined, or, like Jeff Wall's pictures, this is a construction, time is playing out in front of Daguerre's open lens and all of the information inside this and other long exposure images experiences a common temporality. This is a synchrony that does not share its temporal characteristics with a piece of film of similar duration, for example.

The still/movie dialogue is advanced and elucidated by Ernst in his discussion of the film or video projection of a *tableau vivant*, which he argues 'undercuts the apparent visual simultaneity'. (2013, p. 155) He argues that this is how the *tableau vivant* differs from a classical painting. Indeed, it does differ in this way, and at the same time, a painting differs from a photograph,

4 Caygill's talk, organized by the Photographers Gallery and given at the Architectural Association School of Architecture on 09-03-2011, can be viewed in full at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otKyVL6RYno&t=146s> [Accessed 2 December 2019]

in that the duration ‘embodied’ in a painting, such as a history painting, can be extremely long. Victor Burgin acknowledges this, arguing that although a history painting might mark a specific moment in time, a ‘freeze frame’ of sorts, the temporality of the moment of arrest is not straightforward, as several temporally disjointed events can be incorporated. (This is also true of a photomontage, or a manipulated photograph such as the one of Millard Tydings and Earl Browder, discussed in Chapter 1.) Burgin calls the placing of discrete fragments of embodied time into the static event of a painting ‘the folding of the diachronic into the synchronic’ (2004, p. 26). In contrast, the inclusion of a photograph into an archive could be identified as the folding of the synchronic into the diachronic: the discrete time of the image is subsumed into the particular developmental time of the archive of which it is a part.

In ‘Fire and Ice’, a 1984 essay on the temporal complexities of still and moving image, Peter Wollen discusses the metaphorical use of language in his essay title: ‘I began playing with the idea that film is like fire, photography is like ice.’ Wollen also points out the well-known metaphor of photography as a point and film as a line. Both of these are representations that position the photograph as static, as frozen in time; the often cited ‘frozen moment’. And Wollen reiterates: ‘The time of photographs is one of stasis. They endure.’ (pp. 108–110) But his arguments around image time become far more complex, and amongst the many temporal functions of the still image that he considers—including de- and re-contextualizations and the paradoxes around signification—Wollen considers the time of the viewer, a comparatively simple notion, yet one that is pertinent in terms of the temporal endurance of the archive and the image within it:

The lover of photography is fascinated both by the instant and by the past. The moment captured in the image is of near-zero duration and located in an ever-receding ‘then’. At the same time, the spectator’s ‘now’, the moment of looking at the image, has no fixed duration. It can be extended as long as fascination lasts and endlessly reiterated as long as curiosity returns. (p. 108)

He argues that this way of viewing contrasts sharply with how we encounter film, although digital technologies have changed that to a large extent—no longer are we tied to programming times or watching without pause or rewind. Marquard Smith, in his examination of research in the digital age, emphasizes ‘the future as a category of historical time’; he solicits us to re-examine ‘how it functions as a most productive “space” for

projection, imagination, and fantasy; how we can harness our capacity to desire to speculate on the not-yet and the yet-to-come'. (p. 390) The fact that the archivist does not work with any particular future use in mind (Ketelaar, p. 33), must naturally acknowledge this view of archives as a broad and productive futurizing force, and one accommodating to the reiterations of viewing that Wollen mentions. An 'archived' photograph, along with its description, is a complex object in temporal terms. It can be perceived as a synchronic form that captures a discrete moment and remains unaffected by time outside of that moment; yet it is rendered time-critical and timeless through archival processes of cataloguing, preservation, and storage. It is at one and the same time a temporal, atemporal, and supertemporal object.

If the progression of time in the archived photograph is not to be defined through its immediate and discrete visual content and the description thereof, or through the order in which visual elements are written in the description, in what zone does the wider temporality of the photographic object and the archive description lie? The answer, already articulated in relation to the catalogue list in Chapter 3, lies with groupings and sequences—although, as discussed, unsubstantiated interpretation and fabulation from incomplete and non-chronological image sets can threaten the position of the archive photograph as a site of evidence. Newman cites Jeff Wall's 1997 work *A Partial Account (of events taking place between the hours of 9.35 a.m. and 3.22 a.m., Tuesday, 21 January 1997)* as 'a work that plays the elision involved in photography off against cinematic narrative' (p. 72). This series of images is presented as a group of transparencies but was also first commissioned as a tapestry for a courthouse in the Netherlands. The series is, Newman notes, reminiscent of a group of surveillance images in its haphazard framing and exposure—and there are obvious gaps in the narrative, which is centred around the humble brown paper bag. Newman argues:

Given the lack of speech, and the lacunae in the sequence, it is up to the viewer to construct a narrative interpreting the images. The narrative, although partly based on what may be 'factual' images, will necessarily be in the mode of fiction. This suggests that the photograph can never function in an unproblematic way as 'evidence'—it always requires interpretation and fabulation—and that this has at least partly to do with its temporal condition. (ibid.)

Embedded within the hierarchical cataloguing arrangement of the archive, levels of description move 'from the general to the specific' (International



Council on Archives, p. 12), and the temporal configuration follows this structure, as it too moves from general to specific time: within an image archive, units of description proceed downwards through general descriptions of events in time, through to discrete situations within that event, that is, photographs that represent short moments in time. And temporalization emerges through another route: linear progression within a list. Through an untidy development of information that may not present itself as a chronological or narrative form, as is the intention with the images in Wall's *A Partial Account*. The 'units' and 'caesurae' (Young, 2014, n.p.) that present in a catalogue list afford an understanding of time through the relationships and the spaces between the units (the mechanics of the list are examined in more detail in Chapter 3). Descriptions of situations, when encountered together in the catalogue, define the wider temporalities of the event: the event unfolds in time. Within the diachronic milieu of original order, the synchronic image or description of image takes on a unique, and sometimes unexpected, temporality. The lists, and the juxtapositions therein, expose the acutely shallow time and non-chronological advancement of the archive. Paradoxically, it is through the stasis of the archive that time moves forward: the catalogue, whilst not constituting a narrative, builds the plot through a diachronic progression of time, through a multiplicity of pauses, and through an ordered juxtaposition of descriptions that are tightly bound to a numbering system.

Catalogue lists of photographs of investigations into the paranormal from the Harry Price archives, Senate House Library, University of London, illustrate this point precisely. Price's investigations usually took the form of self-contained, theatrical events, such as experiments with fire walking, with being buried alive, or with blindfolded reading, and these events were carefully documented by photography. There is a story within each event, but the story is evidenced, by image and description, outside of a prescribed narrative form, because of the adherence to original order within each set of photographs. The following is taken from a list of photographs documenting a fire-walking test:

**HPG/1/8      Fire Walking      19351946**

Photographs of Harry Price's investigations into firewalking and experiments with Kuda Bux and Ahmed Hussain at Carshalton, Surrey and Alexandria Palace, London. Includes photographs of tests with both firewalkers and the BBC transmission of Hussain's firewalk in 1937, along with photographs of firewalks in other countries.

**HPG/1/8/3      Ahmed Hussein: First Test      1937**

Photographs from the first firewalking test conducted with Cawnpore Muslim, Ahmed Hussain at Carshalton, Surrey (7 April 1937), including the following:

- i. Upper body studio photograph of Ahmed Hussain (2 copies) [1122, 1123]
- ii. Photograph of nurses washing Ahmed Hussain's feet prior to the firewalk
- iii. Photograph of nurses washing Ahmed Hussain's feet prior to the firewalk, different shot from above
- iv. Upper body photograph of Harry Price, C.E.M.Joad, Ahmed Hussain and O.K.De Silva (Hussain's manager), with Price and De Silva pointing, possibly at fire trench
- v. Photograph of back view of Ahmed Hussain praying just before his first firewalk
- vi. Photograph of Dr Parnett and Dr Newcomb examining Hussain's feet after the first walk
- vii. Photograph of Dr Parnett and Dr Newcomb examining Hussain's feet after the first walk, different angle from above
- viii. Photograph of Dr Parnett taking temperature of Hussain's feet prior to walking
- ix. Photograph of Dr Parnett and Dr Newcomb taking temperature at Hussain's feet before walking
- x. Photograph of the raking of the fire trench just before walking
- xi. Photograph of man raking the fire ready before walking
- xii. Photograph of back view of Hussain walking over trench
- xiii. Photograph of Mr Hawkins (of Cambridge Instruments) taking the temperature of the fire trench
- xiv. Photograph of Mrs Dribbel, Harry Price, C.E.M.Joad, Ahmed Hussain and O.K.De Silva standing by fire trench
- xv. Photograph of Reggie Adcock walking over the fire trench (He was unburnt)

In these descriptions, we have people washing; praying; examining; taking; raking; standing; and walking. The use of the present continuous tense in archive image description has the effect of disengaging the reader from the narrative, as it records the situation visible in each image, with no attempt to contextualize it within the event as a whole. It contributes to the perceived 'greyness' of the language, as it pauses the action in a way that results in a rather wearying reading experience. Yet, the 'grey' characteristic of this

written form has its own poetic charm and worth, and this will be addressed in detail in the next chapter.

In his discussion of 'tense' and 'aspect',<sup>5</sup> Wollen argues that the more complex notion of 'aspect' represents an internal temporal structure, closely related to duration and change, or to potential for change (pp. 109-113). Aspect is therefore more often associated with the moving image than it is with the still. Strictly speaking, the present continuous, as used in the fire-walking descriptions, can be termed as aspect rather than tense, as it indicates that a situation is in progress; but it is a language form that signifies a temporary situation, and in this respect it is well suited to describing the photographic moment. We have seen that my own *Patrons* description precisely locates the situation in the 'now', and duration and change are noticeably absent (potential for change is always present, but it is unspoken). Therefore, the temporal structure of a single still image, the 'aspect' as understood in the context of a moving image, is a largely untranslatable entity within the criteria of visual content-based description alone. However, when taken together as a set, archive photographs—their order diachronic, developmental, dependent on collection and use—are able to present duration, change, and 'aspect'. This is replicated in the catalogue list, without straying outside of the rules of description and without assuming a narrative that lies outside the content of the single image. Curiously—and this is something that has been immediately picked up by the audience when I have on occasions read this list out aloud—there is deviation from the present continuous in the very last words of the list, '(He was unburnt)'. This is contextual information bracketed as an aside and functioning outside of the time of the image or the description; it is supplementary to the situation described in photograph xv; it is a note after the event that unmistakably relates to temporal structure, adding the durational slant of 'aspect' to the single image.

Wollen gives insight of the use of tenses in relation to the captioning of different categories of image, including Eadweard Muybridge's explorations of human and animal motion, pointing out that 'the imperfect is used through-out in the captions of Muybridge's series photographs, in participle form'. (p. 109) He is referring to use of the past participle of the verb ending in 'ing', as used in the descriptions above; Muybridge's *Human Figure in Motion* series from the 1870s and '80s carry titles such as 'Two

5 Wollen refers to Bernard Comrie's book on 'Aspect', which he identifies as the standard work on the subject. There are no notes attached to 'Fire and Ice', but I am assuming he is referring to Comrie's 1976 publication, *Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems*.

men. Fencing', 'Woman turning around in surprise and running away', and 'Boy. Child without legs. Getting off a chair.' Using shutter speeds of up to 1/6000th of a second and continuous shooting, these images are strictly chronological and that is their reason for existence. This positions them as more akin to film images—they are, of course, frequently put together as animations and even flip books, an opening up of image time into real time. Wollen terms them as 'signifying processes', rather than 'signifying states' (p. 109). Yet these are fundamentally still images, precise moments of temporal registration. They *become* durational and aspectual, because, like the fire-walking images, they are understood as sets.

An analysis of archival description techniques of images can help us to understand that temporality and narrativity are concepts that are overlapping but distinct. Temporality is central to the image and the archive; narrative is constructed and can threaten the role of the archive image as an object of information and evidence. Ernst argues that 'registering time does not necessarily require the narrative mode to organize the factual field in a form that we call information'. (2013, p. 150) This statement is broadly in relation to computing, but it similarly applies to archive catalogue information, and he goes on to argue that 'The narrative construction of reality is a cultural sense-making pattern; thus common universal history is a hybrid made from legends and annalistic handbooks.' (ibid., p. 151) There is a link here with the formation of 'cultural totalities', *meta*-narratives that Foucault rejects, instead arguing for 'rigorous but unreflected relations'. (2002, pp. 15-17) In the end, description is made for its audience and Wollen admits to 'a fascination with the way a spectator is thrown in or out of the narrative'. (p. 113) The Harry Price fire-walking sequence is a case in point.

## The still image and the filmic gaze

Wolfgang Ernst and Harun Farocki discuss how film images were traditionally sorted mechanically, and explain how technological developments offer new ways of sorting:

Within the medium of film, the practice of montage (cutting) has always already performed a kind of image-based sorting [...] Only video—as a kind of intermediary medium between classical cinema and the digital image—has replaced the mechanical addressing of cinematographic by different means (time code), offering new options of navigating within stored image space. Automated digital linking of images by similarity,

though, creates rather unexpected, improbable links: which are, in the theory of information, the most informative, the least redundant ones. (p. 264)

The ‘unexpected’, ‘improbable’ and ‘most informative’ links of visually similar *still* images are always already present in photographic sequences such as the fire-walking series above. The time anomalies in this list can be clearly identified. The short descriptions, their separation emphasized by an adherence to original order and the ensuing absence of temporal continuity, describe the event in a filmic way: jump cuts, changes of camera position and flashbacks outline the action. Ernst describes how events are revealed in the Bayeux Tapestry as a ‘precinematic form of cutting that has often been added to film or comic strips, with abrupt changes in pace, jumps in time, and flashbacks’. He continues, ‘Physically though, film puts sequences one after the other on a celluloid reel—just as on the Bayeux tapestry.’ (2013, p. 154) (And, one assumes, on Jeff Wall’s tapestry of *A Partial Account*.) The fire-walking photos, unlike either film reels or the Bayeux Tapestry, are not physically connected, but placed loose in a file; their sequence is determined and they are connected by the numbered catalogue list and by their upper level descriptions. In this case, the two upper levels (HPG/1/8 and HPG/1/8/3) describe the event, affording an understanding of the single photographs that make up the set. This is quite unlike the subtitle to *Wall’s A Partial Account*—(*of events taking place between the hours of 9.35 a.m. and 3.22 a.m., Tuesday, 21 January 1997*)—which provides only a time window and no other contextual information whatsoever.

The relationship of still to moving image has been well documented in film studies discourse and it continues to be explored within this field. Alexander Streitberger and Hilde van Gelder see the boundaries between photograph and film as less distinct in the context of the digital (p. 48). Digital technologies undoubtedly afford easy practical investigation of these boundaries; however, as Kittler points out the boundaries have long been blurred: ‘Since Muybridge’s experimental arrangement, all film sequences have been scans, excerpts, selections. And every cinematic aesthetic has developed from the 24-frame-per-second shot.’ (p. 119) Streitberger and van Gelder also perceive film studies as being concerned with the role of the still image inside film, and in their discussion of the ‘photo-filmic’ image they ask: ‘how do filmic techniques based on photographic materials or photographic techniques, such as the freeze frame, affect the perception of a film?’ They provide an answer that takes us back to the narrative pause: ‘Catapulted out of the narrative, the spectator becomes aware of what



Figure 4.1 Jane Birkin. Still from film 0025, from *El Rastro* (2014).  
Author's own work.



Figure 4.2 Jane Birkin. Still from film 0030, from *El Rastro* (2014).  
Author's own work.

she is looking at.' (p. 48) In his essay 'The Film Stilled', Raymond Bellour argues, 'The snapshot turns back into a pose, a pause of time. The moment it captured, no matter how ordinary, thus takes on an extreme singularity—a transcendence?—that comes from stopping movement, from this interruption of time.' He references a number of films that use the still, including *The Machine for Killing Bad People* (Rossellini, 1948), describing how in this film the director repeatedly uses the photograph—as an object, an image within an image—as a device to 'reproduce the effect of the freeze-frame'



Figure 4.3 Jane Birkin. Still from film 0037, from *El Rastro* (2014).  
Author's own work.

(p. 107). Bellour's discussion centres on how the use of the photograph sits within the narrative of the film, 'wavering between fixity and movement' (p. 109)—that is, between situation and event.

Laura Mulvey argues that the moment in time that each frame in a film is exposed to light behind the lens is an index, and she terms this the 'process of inscription'; 'the source of the image's place in time'; its 'there-and-then-ness'. Mulvey is concerned for the visibility of the index in the moving image, as the narrative of a film 'asserts its own temporality', overriding the time of inscription. The original index is hidden, with the still frame 'absorbed into the illusion of movement of narrative' (2003, p. 116). This is core to the understanding of the technical and the textual narrative pause—as presented in both the image and the image description—and my own artwork *El Rastro* (2014) (Figures 4.1-4.3) investigates the whereabouts and the temporality of this hidden frame. For this piece I produced a series of short films of small events around a flea market in Madrid, each unedited and with a standard form of progression, a narrative that could be paused. I overlaid short descriptions of single frames, and these acted as subtitles that overlapped the exact time of inscription, the time of the frame that is described. The description was on the screen for much longer than the frame itself (this was essential to allow for reading time), resulting in both correspondence (figures 4.1 and 4.2) and contradiction (Figure 4.3) between image and description. Moreover, the sets of subtitles taken from each film make no sense as a narrative form, as shown by the list of subtitles from film 0037:

*the boy is holding something close to his face and examining it carefully*  
*'1a MARCAS de HOMBRE A 2€'*  
*'1a MARCAS de MUJER A 2€'*  
*the boy is touching her nose and the woman is touching her head*  
*they look to be in their thirties but they could be older*  
*he appears to be pointing at himself whilst looking at the camera*  
*hips, shoulders and head turned in different directions, gaze directed*  
*towards the lens*

Mulvey perceives the photograph as an object that acts as a reference point to the invention of film. She argues that 'Stillness may evoke a "before" for the moving image as filmstrip, as reference back to photography or to its own original moment of registration.' (2006, p. 67) Newman, however, considers the film/still relationship from a different viewpoint, and in a way that is of significance here within the context of the narrative pause and the scope of image time: he describes how the invention of moving image changed our view of the still image in a radical way, and he argues:

If before cinema photographs were one among many 'static' images, once the moving image became a possibility, and was widely experienced, the 'still' photograph became an 'arrested' or 'stopped' image. As Wall points out in 'My Photographic Production', photography had two, distinct historical kinds of stillness: the stillness of its early years, which made the experience of a photograph different from that of an etching, and its arrestedness after cinema. This 'arrestedness' is exacerbated by the ability of fast film to make visible that which could not be seen by the unaided eye: 'the things that seem most still and most uncannily still were those things which photography had allowed us to see that way'. Such 'arrested' or 'stopped' images also serve to remind us of what we forget while watching a movie—that it consists of still images, frozen slices of movement to which cinema gives an afterlife. (Newman pp. 70-72; quoting Wall 1990, pp. 62-63)

The pre-cinematic image, 'frozen on the photographic plate [...] condemned to fixicity' (Michaud, p. 43) was indeed striking in its stillness and was perceived by Sir John Robison, writing in the *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* in July 1839,<sup>6</sup> as making objects appear to be sleeping, and of portraying a world without movement, one even 'abandoned by the living'.

6 Available at the Daguerreotype Archive (online) at [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8390027\\_ROBISON\\_EDIN-JOURN\\_1839-07.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8390027_ROBISON_EDIN-JOURN_1839-07.pdf) [Accessed 2 December 2019]



The *El Rastro* films, while they certainly make reference to the notion of stillness and the arrested image, nonetheless emphasize life, movement and the relentless passing of time.

Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) is famously a film made up of discrete and non-chronological still images. The one exception to this is a brief moment of eye movement, a conspicuous event that prompts comparison here to the phrase 'he was unburnt' in the fire-walking list, as it stands out as durational in much the same way. The fire-walking photographs are a limited set of still images preserved in a particular order. *La Jetée* is also made up of a limited set of images, their order preserved through different means. In both cases, the events depicted through the juxtaposition of images are distinct from a what we commonly understand as a narrative, in that their elements are contiguous but not chronologically consecutive or interpolated; temporal but not linear. Burgin argues, 'In *La Jetée*, we must search for the space-time between two frames.' And he states, 'The linearity and narrative closure of *La Jetée* is only apparent, a contingent consequence of the conventional demand for a story with a beginning, a middle and an end when the spool of film runs out.' (2004, pp. 104-108) In other words, we are culturally programmed to seek out a narrative. Roger Odin writes in relation to *La Jetée*: 'The absence of reproduction of movement [...] tends to block *narrativity*, since the lack of movement means that there is no before / after opposition within each shot. The [effect of] narrativity can only be derived from the sequence of shots, that is, from montage.' (Quoted in André Gaudreault, p. 72 [original italics]) The insert '[effect of]' is not mine and it is revealing: it places doubt on *La Jetée* as a narrative form, although the film clearly and famously has a story to tell. Wollen upholds the film's position as a narrative and argues that the presentation of many different time zones in *La Jetée*—future, past, and others that lie in between—means that it lacks any structure in regard to tense. He asserts: 'Aspect, however, is still with us.' (pp. 112-113) Marker's approach parallels the complex presentation of archive image sets, with sequences that must be read through a comparative processing of discrete situations. This affords not only 'aspect' as already discussed, but also an understanding of the complex and precarious temporality of events.

## The camera inside the archive

The photograph is, then, a documentation of embodied time, the preservation of a moment of capture that fits well with archival thinking. But it

is also an inherently unstable medium that requires appropriate storage and preservation inside the archive, an environment that itself demands stasis in order to justify its existence. The photographic print is made up of a delicate, light-sensitive emulsion coated on paper. Its permanence is dependent on its own make-up—the reliability of its surface and the strength of its base support—as well as on the environment in which it is kept. Protection from light and humidity, and from poor handling, is key. Guided by emerging technical and scientific methods and by the particular materiality of the object itself, conservators are charged with the task of cleaning and repairing photographic prints and plates and decelerating future degradation by imposing strict environmental controls. But despite innovations in the field of photographic preservation, the photographic print is a precarious object, the negative even more so. Although seductive notions of fading and decay are often associated with photographs kept in archives, the future of the photographic image is at the same time largely perceived as screen-based digital. ‘Born digital’ images promise a future free from tears, stains, creases and fading, and the digitization of analogue images can halt degradation at this second moment of re-capture and second embodiment of time.

The provision of digital surrogates of archive objects unquestionably provides one answer to the problem of the damage that might be incurred to originals through handling and exposure to light; the idea is that researchers can access digital copies without risk to the original object. Thus, the rostrum camera and the copystand have become familiar apparatus in the archive, as the digitization of photographs and documents becomes a routine activity; all kinds of archive objects can be remediated into photographic images—we can make image of images and we can make images of letters and other documents and things. In this respect, the camera, the flat-bed scanner and the film scanner all have roles as archiving devices.

By 2013, the British Library had famously made over one million images available through their Flickr page with a particular focus on images, maps, illustrated manuscripts, artworks and other visual artefacts that are now in the public domain. However, retrospective digitization is a costly business that involves much more than simple scanning or photography of archive objects. If digital objects are to be properly organized, with extant historical information and appropriate new metadata attached, it is a complex and time-consuming activity. Many archives only have the capacity to carry out gradual programmes of digitization, operating on a basis of immediate need. This might include copying the most vulnerable materials, fulfilling particular reprographics orders for researchers,

and making duplicate prints for exhibition and display. Compromise of this kind does not only apply to small or medium sized organizations or public institutions. Estelle Blaschke recounts how Corbis, one of the world's leading commercial image banks, proposed in 1996 to digitize 40,000 of its historic images per month. However, this target became impossible to reach, mostly due to the complexities of the material involved, which had not been properly taken into account. Thus, the project 'shifted from a large-scale project to an on-demand *modus operandi*', with most images scanned when requested by clients. What is significant, as Blaschke points out, is that the programme of digitization is therefore determined by the client and by not the organization (p. 185). Digitization of this kind becomes a wholly uneven process, largely undercutting the roles of archivists and conservators in devising digitization programmes and also leaving archival sequences incomplete in their digital form.

All digital files are at risk of deterioration and archivists are rightly fearful of the breakdown or obsolescence of the hardware and software systems that contain them (more on this in Chapter 6), but digitization freezes the ageing process in a way that is beyond the scope of the conservator, and freezes time in a way that is—at least as a concept—consistent with the rationale of the archive as place of stasis. However, Ernst expresses fear that digitization produces 'a negentropic insistence, a negation of decay and passing away'. (2015, n.p.) That is, the newly digitized object represents a termination of the natural course of decay that would be seen to occur in the original object. A parallel argument could be made that conservators, who are charged with the task of slowing down or halting degradation so that objects can continue to function as useful historical documents, are also interfering with the authenticity of the object. These two kinds of intervention—one digital, one analogue—whilst fulfilling the principal aim of the archive to keep records, to manage and preserve information for the future, could both be seen to be disrupting the natural processes of ageing and decay, halting the ability of the original object to function as a self-programmed and independent signifier of time. The conservation mantra that repairs should be reversible represents a concern for the possibility of newer, better repairs becoming possible in the future, but it also indicates the conservator's own apprehension towards interference with the authenticity of the object.

Digitization can in fact lead to an intentional neglect of the original object, allowing natural decay to take its course: some institutions use digitization as a money saving device; conservation is expensive, and once the object is digitized, it does not need to be preserved in order to for it to be viewed.

A common scenario connected to this is that a 'digi-prep' programme is undertaken, whereby objects are not properly conserved but are simply rendered fit for the digitization process, so that they look respectable and are readable under the camera. This process lies in the margins of conservation, and it arguably goes against point 4.2 of The Institute of Conservation's 'Code of Conduct': 'You should strive to conserve cultural heritage so that it can continue to be used for education and enjoyment, as reliable evidence of the past and as a resource for future study.'<sup>7</sup> What is even worse is that objects may be destroyed after they have been digitized, saving on limited and expensive storage space. The fact that old negatives are particularly difficult to keep, pose health risks and require expensive frost-free freezers to contain them safely, exacerbates the problems of storage. Early nitrate film is highly prone to decomposition and is also flammable. Later diacetate and triacetate film although not in itself a fire hazard, gives off harmful chemicals as it deteriorates, and—because of its recognizable smell—what is known as 'vinegar syndrome' sets in (Messier, n.p.). These particular materials are therefore more likely than any to be destroyed. Parikka rightly remarks that deterioration of this kind 'represents an interface between the world of chemistry and physics and cultural memory' (2012, 117), and we see this with regards to modern scientific conservation techniques as well as in the processes of degradation.

Copying objects by making new negatives on polyester film was at one time the preferred option, as this is a safe and durable material, readable by the human eye, requiring only a light source and perhaps magnification. Any prints subsequently required could be made from these new negatives. Facilities for analogue photography and processing in archives are now rare, with digital capture the standard way of copying historic negatives. The microfilm camera was also once an indispensable piece of photographic equipment in the archive, producing high quality surrogate images that—like traditional negatives—are not reliant on changing digital technologies. They can be read on a microfilm reader, a relatively simple piece of analogue equipment, once commonplace in public and academic libraries. The microfilm has a long history: experimentation with reducing down daguerreotypes started as early as 1839, and after various iterations, in 1935 Eastman Kodak introduced the Rekordak, specifically to preserve newspapers, as an alternative to the space-hungry physical storage of a media that is also at high risk of degradation. Soon after this, universities began

7 The Institute of Conservation's Code of Conduct (2014) Available at: [https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon\\_code\\_of\\_conduct.pdf](https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_code_of_conduct.pdf) [Accessed 12 May 2019]

using microfilm to keep dissertations and other research papers, and the Recordak was also installed in the Science Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Henning, p. 60). However, early microfilm was also acetate based and so predisposed to the same 'vinegaring' as traditional acetate negatives. To counteract this, in the 1990s Kodak introduced a microfilm with a polyester base that they claimed would be stable for 500 years (Saper, n.p.) although, as with many claims about new technologies, this remains to be proven. Space being at a premium, many archives have removed their microfilm cameras and replaced them with the now necessary high-resolution digital units. It is interesting to note that microfilm cameras that are now classed as redundant in the UK are often sold on to institutions in less developed countries, where access to digital media and networks—and sometimes even to electricity—is unreliable.

What many people do not realize is, as Lisa Gitelman notes, that databases such as *Early English Books Online (EBBO)*, which provides digital facsimiles of English language printed works dating from 1470 to 1700, uses images scanned from microfilm made by and held in archives—as do many other large research databases (pp. 79–80). And, conversely, there is now an option available for having microfilm images made from high quality digital files. Therefore, although microfilm readers for public use in libraries are becoming increasingly scarce, archival microfilms continue to be made by commercial companies, with copies often being stored offsite in case of catastrophic event, such as flood or fire. Storage facilities are provided by companies such as DeepStore, whose clients include the UK's National Archives. Curiously, DeepStore is both a minerals company and a records management organization: it provides PD5454<sup>8</sup> compliant, underground storage in a 200 million square metre working salt mine in Cheshire.<sup>9</sup> This is a strikingly symbiotic arrangement between the two very different strands of the company: the more salt that is taken out, the more storage space there is for the growing corpus of archive materials, and the salty atmosphere underground renders the temperature and humidity appropriate for archival storage.

Gitelman argues that 'reproduction is one of the functions that have helped people to reckon documents as documents' (p. 1). In other words, the

8 PD5454: 2012 'Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials' provides a series of recommendations aimed at helping archives and other custodians of heritage material to determine the appropriate storage conditions for their collections. For example, the guide recommends a temperature range of 13–20°C and a relative humidity (RH) level between 35% and 60%. It advises on light conditions and air quality and also on the safe movement of materials to and from different environments, such as from strongroom to searchroom.

9 [www.deepstore.com](http://www.deepstore.com) [Accessed 2 June 2019]

importance of unique official documents such as birth and death certificates, driving licences and so on, is highlighted by the fact that they frequently need to be copied. In the archive, copies supplied to users are typically accompanied by layers of administration and fresh documentation, ensuring that the copy is only used by the person who has requested it and signed for it, and for the specific reason they have given; an image provided for private study cannot be used for publication or commercial use, for example. Another important motivation for the digitization of an archive object is for reasons of documentation within the archive itself: to make a visual record of an object, or a part of an object, in its present state. This could be, for example, prior to conservation being carried out, or before it is exhibited or loaned to another institution. This type of photographic reproduction forms part of a wider body of documents that relate to the object and tell us more about it, including a written description of its physical state.

In trying to identify what a document actually is—what makes it a document and not just a ‘thing’—Gitelman argues, ‘once it is framed or entered into as evidence—once it is mobilized—it becomes a document’ (pp. 2-3). ‘Documentalist’ Suzanne Briet famously gives the example of the antelope in the zoo (a document) or in the wild (not a document). Briet herself acknowledges the complex interconnectedness of documentation, how a ‘unity of thought’ develops as documentation grows (p. 13). She recognizes, even as she writes in 1951, that ‘our age of multiple and accelerated broadcasts’ means that documentation forms a complex and fast-moving chain. She puts forward the many secondary documents that might arise from the primary document that is the aforesaid antelope:

The living animal is placed in a cage and cataloged (zoological garden). Once it is dead, it will be stuffed and preserved (in the Museum). It is loaned to an Exposition. It is played on a soundtrack at the cinema. Its voice is recorded on a disk. The first monograph serves to establish part of a treatise with plates, then a special encyclopedia (zoological), then a general encyclopedia. The works are cataloged in a library, after being announced at publication (publisher catalogues and Bibliography of France). The documents are recopied (drawings, watercolours, paintings, statues, photos, films, microfilms), then selected, analysed, described, translated (documentary productions). (pp. 10-11)

In the previous chapter, listing is presented as a cultural technique, and Briet argues that documentation as a whole ‘has appeared in the eyes of many people as “a cultural technique” of a new type’. (p. 13) Thus, the case is

powerfully made for methods of documentation in the archive and museum to be incorporated into the litany of cultural techniques. Bernhard Siegert cites the catalogue as an object of interest in this respect, and speculates that cultural techniques could be useful in many connected areas of study:

By ascending to the status of a new media-theoretical and cultural studies paradigm, cultural techniques now also include means of time measurement, legal procedures, and the sacred. Depending on the degree to which these disciplines are affected by the 'cultural turn', the concept of cultural techniques may be able to provide a systematic foundation for paleoanthropology, animal studies, the philosophy of technology, the anthropology of images, ethnology, fine arts, and the histories of science and the law. (2015, p. 10)

It is nonetheless surprising that Briet should perceive documentation as a cultural technique as early as 1951, before the onset of the current wave of interest in the topic, specifically that which relates to information and communications technologies, which Siegert argues was added in the 1980s (*ibid.*).

For Robin Boast, it is reproducibility, and the related issue of mobility, that lies at the core of the media object:

Another key quality of media is that they can be copied—reproduced. This may be, as it was for most of history, a laborious process of copying by hand, but such copying, and even translation of works, is what allowed medieval Europe to read the scientific, philosophical and mathematical works of the more advanced Islamic scholars, as well as the works of the long-past Greeks and Romans that the Islamic world had preserved through copying and translation. Copying is a form of preservation, of persistence [...] The greatest advantage of printing, phonographic recording, photography and film, which lends them their primary purpose, is that all these media technologies are based on copying—making many exact copies of the original, which can exist in many places at the same time, even many different places at many different times. (p. 166)

So, it may be that copies of printed works, photographs, and letters—as well as the many other layers of documentation that Briet lists—can appear in more than one archive collection, and in many different researchers' hands at the same time. Documents in general have always been copied, either 'off the record' or officially, either by hand or by a variety of technical means.

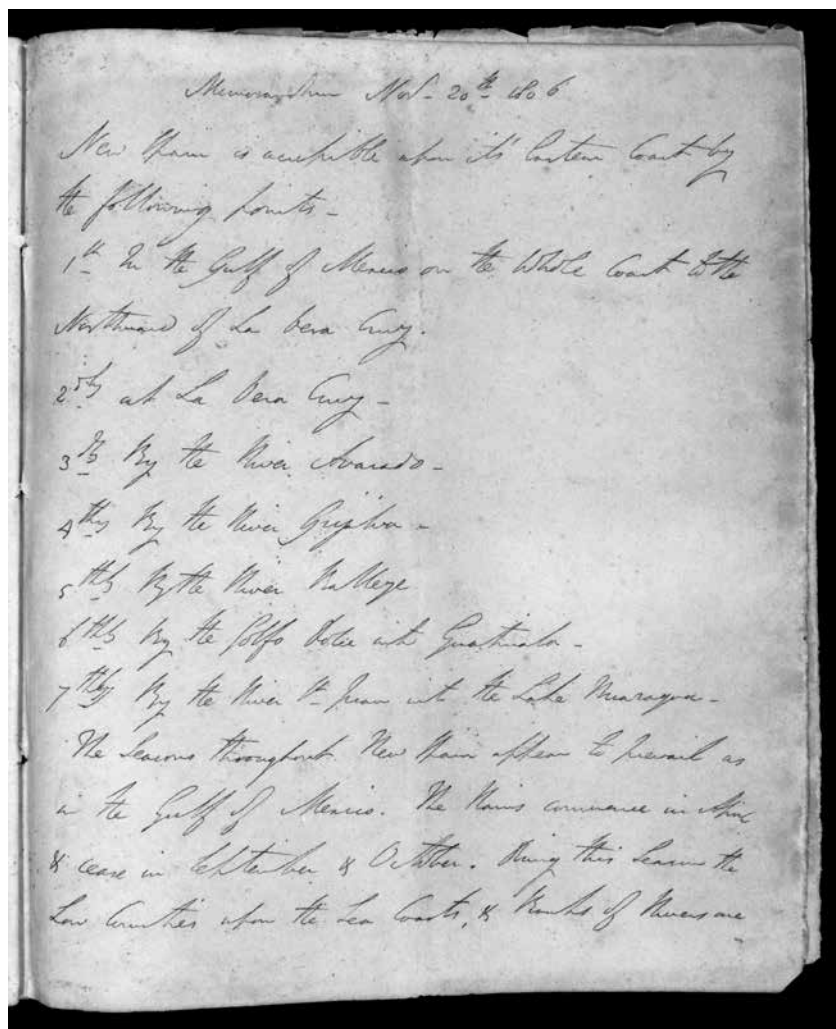


Figure 4.4 Page from a copy book of the First Duke of Wellington, a memorandum dated 20 November 1806, MS 61 WP1/165.

Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.

Figure 4.4 shows an example of James Watt's system of copying, from the University of Southampton's Special Collections. The copy was made using a direct transfer of ink onto dampened paper, using a press, and Watt's machine (patented in 1780) is often described as an early form of photocopier. It produced a mirror image, but on very thin paper so that it could be easily read from the back. Many objects that end up in archives and are referred to as originals are in fact copies, and of course this includes photographic



prints, which we might say are always already copies, taken as they are from the original negative. At a conference I recently attended, there was almost universal dissatisfaction for the way in which the date of printing of a photograph—and subsequent reprinting—is seldom recorded in its history.

Following the concept of original order, if we are to view archive photographs as meaningful because of where they are placed amongst other documents, then it is where they eventually settle—the specificity of place—that determines their uniqueness as object, their context, and their temporality. The fact that they may be one print of many from the same negative is of little importance in this respect. The historical and temporal status of the photographic copy—its ‘moment of registration’ (Mulvey, 2006, p. 67), and its other significant instance, that of its mobilization as document (Gitelman, p. 3)—is complex.

## Works cited

- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- Barthes, R. (1989). *The Reality Effect*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Bellour, R. (1990). The Film Stilled. *Camera Obscura*, 24, 99-123.
- Blaschke, E. (2016). *Banking on Images: the Bettmann Archive and Corbis*. Leipzig: Spector Books.
- Boast, R. (2017). *The Machine in the Ghost: Digitality and its Consequences*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.
- Briet, S. (1951). *What is Documentation?* (Translated and edited by Ronald E. Day, Laurent Martinet and Hermina G.B. Angheliescu). Paris: Éditions Documentaires.
- Burgin, V. (2004). *The Remembered Film*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Ernst, W. (2013). *Digital Memory and the Archive*. Edited and with an introduction by J. Parikka. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Ernst, W. (2015). Between the Archive and the Anarchivable. *Mnemoscape*, 1 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mnemoscape.org/single-post/2014/09/04/Between-the-Archive-and-the-Anarchivable-by-Wolfgang-Ernst> [Accessed 14 September 2018]
- Ernst, W. & Farocki, H. (2004). Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts. In T. Elsaesser (Ed.), *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines* (pp. 261-286). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Fowler, D.P. (1991). Narrate and Describe: the Problem of Ekphrasis. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 81, 25-35.

- Gaudreault, A. (1990) Film, Narrative, Narration: the Cinema of the Lumière Brothers in T. Elsaesser (Ed.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (pp. 68-75). London: British Film Institute.
- Gitelman, L. (2014). *Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Henning, M. (2018). *Photography: the Unfettered Image*. London: Routledge.
- International Council on Archives (2000). *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*. 2nd ed. Ottawa: International Council on Archives.
- Ketelaar, E. (1996). Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual. *Archivaria*, 41, 31-40.
- Kittler, F. A. (1999). *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- La Jetée* (1962). Directed by Chris Marker [Film]. France: Argos Films.
- Lukács, G. (1970). Narrate or Describe. In G. Lukács, *Writer and critic and Other Essays* (pp. 110-148). London, Merlin Press.
- McCarthy, C. (2006). *The Road*. London: Picador.
- Messier, P. (2008). *Preserving Your Collection of Film-Based Photographic Negatives*. Conservation OnLine (COOL) Available at: <http://cool.conservation-us.org/byauth/messier/negrmcc.html> [Accessed 12 May 2019]
- Michaud, P.-A. (2004). *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*. New York: Zone Books.
- Mulvey, L. (2003). The 'Pensive Spectator' Revisited: Time and its Passing in the Still and Moving Image. In D. Green (Ed.), *Where is the Photograph?* (pp. 113-122). Maidstone and Brighton: Photoforum and Photoworks.
- Mulvey, L. (2006). *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London, Reaktion.
- Newman, M. (2007). *Jeff Wall: Works and Collected Writings*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa.
- Panofsky, E. (1962). *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Parikka, J. (2012). *What is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Saper, C. (2018). Microfilm Lasts Half a Millennium. *The Atlantic* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/07/microfilm-lasts-half-a-millennium/565643/> [Accessed 4 September 2018]
- Schmitt, C. (2016). Interpret or Describe. *Representations* 135(1), 109-112.
- Sekula, A. (1982). On the Invention of Photographic Meaning. In V. Burgin (Ed.), *Thinking Photograph* (pp. 84-109). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Sekula, A. (1984). *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks 1973-1983*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.
- Siebert, B. (2015). *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. New York: Fordham University Press.

- Smith, M. (2013). Theses on the Philosophy of History: the Work of Research in the Age of Digital Searchability and Distributability. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 12 (3), 375-403.
- Streitberger, A. & Van Gelder, H. (2010). Photo-Filmic Images in Contemporary Visual Culture. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 48-53.
- Tagg, J. (1988). *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Education Limited.
- Wall, J. (1990). My Photographic Production. In J.-P. Joly (Ed.), *Symposium: Die Photographie in Der Zeitgenössen Kunst. Eine Veranstaltung Der Akademie Schloss Solitude* (pp. 6-7). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Cantz.
- Wollen, P. (2007). Fire and Ice, in D. Campany (Ed.), *The Cinematic* (pp. 108-113). London: Whitechapel and Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Young, L.C. (2014). On Lists and Networks: an Archaeology of Form. *Amodern* 2 [Online]. Available at: <http://amodern.net/article/on-lists-and-networks/> [Accessed 19 July 2018]

## 5 Archival art, performativity and poetics

### Abstract

Chapter five looks at art that emerges from archival thinking. Artists and photographers have visualized the passing of time through the aesthetics of degradation, and this is discussed, but the main focus of the chapter is the rule-based practices shared by archivists and art practitioners alike, including artists working with text. Archival description is identified as 'grey literature', part of the wider poetics of administration. A call is made for the raising of the status of description (much maligned in literary and academic circles), and for its consideration as an important poetic and rhythmic form. The unfamiliarity of the language of description is intensified when it is brought out of the archive, where it becomes a radical form of writing.

**Keywords:** conceptual art; decay; grey literature; instruction; performativity; poetics

In 2004, Hal Foster famously used the phrase 'archival impulse' (p. 3), as he charted the popularity of archival art back to the pre-war photographic samplings by artists such as Alexander Rodchenko and John Heartfield. Wolfgang Ernst observes a similar 'cultural obsession' with archives in the early twenty-first century (2002, p. 475), and he is of the opinion that much of the art practice around recollection is anthropological, focusing on human memory, 'deriving from the old media of archive and library, collection and museum'. (2001, p. 97-99) Public interest and art practice in response to the archive has indeed boomed, with both art and popular

<sup>1</sup> In the notes to his essay 'An Archival Impulse', Hal Foster explains that his title 'echoes Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Notes toward a Theory of Postmodernism,' *October* 12 and 13 (Spring and Summer 1980), as well as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive,' *October* 88 (Spring 1999).'

culture drawing on archive media that is typically decayed or otherwise degraded, and this aspect of the archive warrants examination here in media-archaeological terms.

In contrast, the complexities of control and prescriptive working practices, which have been explored in previous chapters with regard to institutional archival processes, are considered in this chapter through art and photographic practices that do not simply engage with old archival media, but instead with the machinery and particularities of organization that underpin the archive, and administrative spaces in more general terms. Both textual and visual practices are scrutinized in this chapter, through their convergence with archival thinking; in particular, conceptual art and writing practices that follow instructional methodologies that have confluence with archival processes. This includes the text-based work of the Fluxus group in the 1960s, and the Art & Language group, operating at the beginning of the 1970s against the backdrop of early cybernetics and presenting clear connections to this.

From this, there follows a discussion of the poetic nature of administrative writing, and of archival description in particular. Due to the mix of the rules that are laid down and the personal approaches that intervene, catalogue lists and descriptions of images present a distinctive literary form: they are dry yet poetic, mechanical yet human, a convergence between technician and technique that can be appreciated as a form in its own right. Description also aligns with other poetic writing systems that apply constraints, such as those employed by the Oulipo group,<sup>2</sup> founded in 1960s France, as well as by today's conceptual writers<sup>3</sup> and poets, such as Kenneth Goldsmith and Simon Morris. These writers are examined with reference to their involvement in recordkeeping, transcription and documentation techniques.

Walter Benjamin places translation 'midway between poetry and doctrine' (1999, p. 28). As detailed in Chapter 3, image description shares many of the features of interlingual translation in terms of following certain procedural directives, and I would place it together with translation in Benjamin's midway space. The peculiarities of language are all the more apparent when description is brought out of the institution and into a world where images abound and the language of description may appear unnecessary,

2 The Oulipo group used constrained writing techniques such as—but not confined to—lipo-grams', compositions that omit a certain letter throughout. The group comprised mathematicians as well as experimental writers.

3 More about conceptual writing and examples of such work can be found on Kenneth Goldsmith's *UbuWeb* at <http://www.ubu.com/concept/> (Accessed 13 December 2019)

unfamiliar, and even radical. This discussion is significant in the light of my own art practice around description and once again I include an example of my work in this chapter. The overlapping concepts of ‘work’ and ‘art’ are ever-present in my own practice and in those of others mentioned, in terms of the predetermined structures and controlled methodologies that oversee both. The radicalization that takes place as administrative writing is moved out of the working environment is clear.

## The enduring archival aesthetic of decay

Vilém Flusser writes in 1985 about the certain decay of physical materials:

There have always been attempts to put information in permanent storage (*aere perennis*) or at least in media that degenerate very slowly such as bronze or marble. But it was always a lost cause, for all storage media, because they are material, which is to say natural, are subject to the second law of thermodynamics and must decay along with the information they carry.

He argues that such material decay could be averted through ‘a technical answer’, where ‘information can be generated and stored without a material support’. (2011 [1985], pp. 108–109) Although his argument was in 1985 forward-thinking and rather prescient, covering problems of accumulating waste as well as cultural loss, his thoughts on the permanence of electronic media have since been proven flawed: the decay of these electronic systems of storage is now widely accepted—and is of great concern inside the archive, where stability of storage, whether physical or digital, is vital. Jussi Parikka, with particular reference to archives and museums, argues that ‘everything material thing decays’. This is in relation to original objects, where time ‘exhibits itself through deterioration’ and to the decay of digital and digitized objects, also situated as a temporal phenomenon. Thus, the temporal nature of decay is a topic that is worthy of media-archaeological investigation (2012, pp. 117–118). In the case of original objects, the time of decay does not always follow the time of the object: old papers are more stable than new, for example, and decay can be accelerated by poor storage, so that two objects of the same age and material make-up may display the effects of the passage of time very differently.

Alongside—and within—media archaeological enquiry, degradation and decay must also be considered against the background of the visual

culture and the popular perceptions of the archive: archive objects are expected to be dusty and decaying; they are not considered spoilt by this, but in some way enhanced. In *A Geology of Media*, Parikka writes about the aesthetic and even the romantic qualities of decay, particularly dust: 'There is something poetic about dust. It is the stuff of fairy tales, stories of deserted places—of attics and dunes, of places from so long ago they seem to never have existed. Dusty books: the time of the archive that layers slowly on shelves and manuscripts.' (2015, p. 85)

Svetlana Boym recounts how, on removing a ruined image from her malfunctioning printer, she discovers that imperfection somehow produces 'aura' and she decides to keep the print (p. 73). She also celebrates accidental damage and 'natural' degradation, such as that which occurs when photographs are not cared for, 'stored in plastic bags under my desk [...] with the stains of lemon tea and the fingerprints of indifferent friends' (p. 76). Boym is certainly not alone in this celebration of the flawed: damaged and imperfect photographic prints are much revered in the public imagination. Dusty, faded, torn and creased, these charmingly damaged artefacts trigger memories and feelings of nostalgia, not only through their content but also through their physical condition. In her discussion of the mediation of memory—that is, the reliance on objects for the inscription and the preservation of memories, both personal and communal—José van Dijck argues that our own fading and transmuting memories are interconnected with the decaying of memory-triggering media objects, thus forming a 'double paradox' of the *stability* that we seek through media objects such as photographs, and the inevitable *change* in both memories and objects. She puts forward this explanation:

Memory objects serve as representations of a past or former self, and their robust materiality seems to guarantee a stable anchor of memory retrieval—an index to lived experience. But the hypothesis that mediated memory objects remain constant each time we use them as triggers is equally fallacious as the outdated theory that memories remain unaffected upon retrieval—a theory meticulously refuted by neuroscientists. After all, photo chemicals and ink on paper tend to fade, and home videos as a result of frequent replay (and even if left unused their quality deteriorates). In fact, it is exactly this material transformation—its decay or decomposing—that becomes part of a mutating memory: the growing imperfect state of these items connotes continuity between past and present. (p. 37)

The use of degraded media can undoubtedly be a valid and very useful way for artists to explore affective ideas of memory, time and loss. I want provide one example here, that of Christian Boltanski's photo-installation *Menschlich* (*Humanity*) (1994-1995). This is a collection of 1300 photographs whose only categorization criteria is that they are photographs of people from the time of the Second World War; they are otherwise unconnected. Although, like much of Boltanski's work, the piece is materially based around archival concepts of collection and accumulation, it could be deemed *anarchival* in its underlying structure: images are plucked from their original contexts, losing their connections and their unique place in the world. Boltanski's photographs are mainly snapshots, taken from a variety of sources, and many appear faded or otherwise aged. First conceived as a large-scale installation, *Menschlich* was also published as an artist's book, printed on newsprint or some very similar paper stock. Many of these images were in fact taken *from* newspapers and the choice of flimsy paper further intensifies their imperfections. The book will surely become more imperfect over time, as newsprint is one of the most problematic of supports to preserve. But this is all part of it, and David Company argues that through these images, 'The atrocities of the twentieth century are evoked but not directly imaged' (p. 58). Along the same lines, van Dijck pertinently asks, 'could it be the very combination of material aging and supposed representational inertia that accounts for their growing emotional value?' (p. 37)

In her 'Glitch Studies Manifesto', Rosa Menkman issues a warning: 'Be aware of easily reproducible *glitch effects* automated by softwares and plugins. What is now a glitch will become a fashion.' (p. 11 [original italics]) The degraded archive image could be perceived as a glitch aesthetic from the past; its popularity feeds and fits in with the obsession for vintage-inspired filters.<sup>4</sup> Effects can easily be applied to images as part of social media engagement or through camera apps that quite seamlessly reproduce a variety of time-damaged and time-specific effects, including adding dust. Whereas a legitimate story can be told through the natural degradation of objects of all kinds, including Boym's tea stained images, there is

4 This is being challenged nowadays with the emergence of the popular 'nofilter' hashtag, on Instagram in particular, with around 40 million 'nofilter' tagged images uploaded daily. The hashtag is used as a point of pride, especially by users who have captured particularly striking landscapes and natural phenomena, such as the clear blue seas of the Bahamas, or the Northern Lights. (<https://www.busbud.com/blog/exposing-the-nofilter-movement/>) However, the 'Filter Fakers' blog (<http://filterfakers.com>), an automated image feed, identifies a large number of 'nofilter' images that they believe to have had filters secretly applied. The Busbud article estimates the number of 'nofilter' fakes at over 7% of those tagged. (Both accessed 13 December 2019)



a different one to be told through use of digital photo filters. As van Dijck argues, media manufacture memories (pp. 15-17), and that this is particularly evident in terms of filter use today. Many users of vintage filters do not directly remember Kodak colourways, Polaroid formats and the like. Yet all glitches—whether produced through natural degradation or applied digital effects—are a pointer to the materiality of the photographic object. Filters twist the temporalities of old and new images alike, yet they create a new materiality and a new temporality of the image, turning it from being a token of the past to being a very material signifier of the new; a sign of the times; a nostalgia successfully upheld by software companies. Boym denies herself the use of ‘preprogrammed special effects’, because she distrusts the ‘conspiratorial belief in universal simulation’ (p. 76). Yet she is being seduced by the exact same aesthetic of error and glitch that she dislikes, albeit generated in a way that she perceives as more material, less programmed.

The dusty aesthetic of the archive, which extends beyond the objects themselves and into the corridors and storage systems in which they are contained, is by and large a myth—Parikka’s ‘fairy tale’ (2015, p. 85)—but like the degraded object itself, it persists in the popular imagination as an iconic trait. With the use of hi-tech environmental management systems and HEPA filters (see Figure 5.1), dust in the modern archive environment is all but removed. However, it cannot be denied that photographic materials degrade, and I have touched on the physical and chemical aspects of decay, such as the ‘vinegaring’ of film, in Chapter 4. Although degradation may represent a loss of information, as Flusser maintains, ‘even in the ruins, new information is always emerging’ (2011, p. 106). In other words, degraded images and other objects are at their most significant when their degradation is measured not as loss, nor as aesthetic device, but as new information about the object itself. In the conservation studio, this new information is measured and documented: conservators write detailed reports that note the material condition of objects: the creases, cockles, tears, dirt, fades and folds, as well as previous repairs undertaken. Whereas damage to images is only very briefly noted in standard archival catalogue descriptions, usually when it compromises visual content, in condition reports done by conservators it is the visual content itself that is largely perceived as an aside—or simply as a convenient way of pointing to the specific place where the damage lies.

This duality of thinking around decay and information marks the archive as a place that requires careful navigation between materiality and content, and it may at times be wholly valid—for researchers as well as conservators—to consider objects in terms of their material condition, and this is



Figure 5.1 Ceiling ducting carrying filtered air and other services, Special Collections, University of Southampton.

Courtesy of the Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.

discussed in more detail in the following chapter. However, this notion lies outside of the standard archival structure which places the object, as document, in an epistemic framework where knowledge is gleaned from the *content* of the document—the focus of the job of the conservator as well as

the archivist—and indeed from the catalogue descriptions of content. The emphasis of rest of this chapter on archival art is therefore placed on archive systems, on art and conceptual writing practices that follow performative archival methodologies.

## Photographic performativity

The word ‘performativity’ is used in here in a specific context, one that is carefully and clearly set out by Margaret Iversen in her 2010 essay on Ed Ruscha, ‘Auto-maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography’. Iversen argues that the term performative is often wrongly used to define work that has an explicit element of performance, whereas it should be ‘reserved for the work of those artists who are interested in displacing spontaneity, self expression and immediacy by putting into play repetition and the inherently iterative character of the instruction’. (p. 15) She therefore sees performativity as beginning with an instruction or rule and then being followed through with the performance of this instruction, that is, the making of the work. Within this definition of performativity then, the second stage, the *implementation*, is critical. The specification of two distinct actions, the second dependent on the first, differentiate this use of the term ‘performative’ from the early designation by J.L. Austin (p. 5) where the ‘saying’ and the ‘doing’ are one and the same thing (famously, the performative utterance of ‘I do’ in the course of the marriage ceremony). Iversen’s definition also differs from the theatrical and phenomenological ideas of performativity as set out by Judith Butler. Butler’s take on performativity is often aligned with performance art and is somewhat alien to grey notions of archival administration. Yet she argues, ‘This repetition is a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.’ (p. 397) Butler too sees repetition as critical to performativity and she emphasizes the greyness of the activity itself.

Inside the archive, the day-to-day labour of archivists and archive assistants is highly performative. Organization, storage, cataloguing and description are directed by prescribed standards; control is established early on in the working process, through the institutionalized design of the cataloguing workflow. The archivist, working to established conventions, produces work that is quasi-algorithmic in form and intent, but even though it is a procedural and rules-based activity, description—at all levels—takes its lead from the objects to be described and their order; both of which can

be difficult and unruly. And, as already noted, there is always room for human thought and decision-making within description writing. The end result of this object-human-system fusion, the following through of the instruction, the performance, the transfer of object to text, is a fluid and negotiable activity and therefore must be accepting of the unpredictable. Iversen sees the carrying out of the instruction as something that in itself produces ‘accident, chance or unforeseen circumstances’ (p. 16). It is in this respect that her take on performativity is perhaps most significant to archival practices.

Iversen cites Ed Ruscha’s seminal work *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) as an appropriate example of performative photography. This piece, like many of Ruscha’s photographic series, materializes in the form of a book. *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* is a set of photographs of all the gas stations along Route 66 between Los Angeles and Oklahoma City. According to Iversen (ibid.), and gleaned from a 1965 *Artforum* interview,<sup>5</sup> the choice of instruction was fairly arbitrary: ‘the work began as a “play on words”, he liked the word “gasoline” and the specific quantity “twenty-six”. The design for the cover was finished before a single photograph was taken.’ (Coplans, p. 25) Iversen adds: ‘Given the title’s priority, it can readily be understood a contracted form of an instruction: “record 26 gasoline stations along Route 66”.’ (p. 16)

A fascinatingly comparable archival example is a collection from University of Southampton’s Industrial Archaeology Group,<sup>6</sup> a small archive that contains, amongst other material, The Hampshire Roads Survey (Figure 5.2). This project was designed to record the state of various ‘A’ roads in the late 1960s in Hampshire (a county in southern England). This was a time of rapid infrastructural change in the Britain, with numerous road widening and building projects taking place. A team of three—driver, observer and recorder—documented roadside features such as pubs, petrol stations, bridges, road signs and milestones, all things that they feared would soon disappear. We now know that in most cases they were proven right. The teams each took one road in its entirety for their study and they used photography, index cards and map-making for their documentation. The photographs are bland and unpredictable in their quality; the recorders were certainly not professional photographers. What is apparent though,

5 Extracts from this interview are available on Ubuweb at [http://www.ubu.com/papers/ruscha\\_publications.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/ruscha_publications.html) (Accessed 13 December 2019)

6 This group is now defunct and the Archive is now owned by the Hampshire Field Club and deposited in the University of Southampton Library’s Special Collections.



Figure 5.2 Nine contact prints from the Hampshire Roads Survey, MS1/LF780/UNI 7/105/6.

Special Collections Division, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.

is that the teams were working to a set plan, carrying out instructions that were likely something like Ruscha's own, such as 'record all roadside features along the A31'.

In the *Artforum* interview, Ruscha describes his photographs as 'nothing more than snapshots' and states, 'I want absolutely neutral material. My pictures are not that interesting, nor the subject matter.' (Coplans, p. 25) Aron Vinegar describes the deadpan approach that Ruscha takes as 'a mode of photography that seems emotionally detached or "neutral" in the sense that it does not make outright judgements, and thus tends to

emphasize what might be called an “evidentiary” condition’. (p. 30) This approach fits with the neutrality of the archive in relation to appraisal and cataloguing processes, and it demonstrates why image sets such as those in The Hampshire Roads Survey, although they are imperfect snapshots, little known and rarely consulted, are so perfectly placed in an archival setting.

Iversen (p. 16) cites Marcel Duchamp’s *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913–1914) as an early example of instructional art and connects the piece to Ruscha’s own methodology. The following is an instruction from Duchamp found in a box of notes from 1914:

—If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane distorting itself *as it pleases* and creates a new shape of the unit of length.—3 patterns obtained in more or less similar conditions; *considered in relation to one another* they are an *approximate reconstitution* of a measure of length. (Sanouillet and Petersen, p. 22 [original italics])

*Three Standard Stoppages* fits the performative model that Iversen presents, where instruction is proposed, carried through and produces unpredictable results. She notes that in 1960 Ruscha produced a collage entitled *Three Standard Envelopes*, which she identifies as a direct homage to Duchamp, putting this forward as evidence that the instructional title *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* was in itself a Duchampian reference point. And in the Artforum interview, Ruscha identifies his book as a collection of ‘ready-mades’ (Coplans, p. 25), which would point to the content and not to the photographs themselves. Iversen also points out the possible influence on Ruscha from the instructional work of the Fluxus group, discussed later in this chapter, and in particular the ‘minimal verbal instructions’ or ‘event scores’ for George Brecht’s performance pieces (p. 14).

Luke Skrebowski (p. 93) in his discussion of American artist Mel Bochner’s theory of photography, considers the words ‘Photography Cannot Record Abstract Ideas’. These are words that Bochner uses in one part of his piece entitled *Misunderstandings (A Theory of Photography)* (1967–70), where the words are pictured hand-written on an index card, together with an attribution to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It is not known whether this statement on the shortcomings of photography is fact or fiction, but Skrebowski succinctly calls it out as a ‘flip repudiation of the knowledge sold door-to-door’ (p. 93). This encyclopaedic reference on photography’s shows itself to be ignorant of ‘photoconceptualism’—or indeed the

‘proto-photo-conceptualism’ to which Iversen assigns Ruscha’s work, through his connections to Duchamp (p. 13). Skrebowski (p. 95) ties Bochner’s use of these words to the problematic notion of photography as pure depiction, which led to various ‘photoconceptual’ artists making quasi-journalistic images in order to get around the problem (Wall, 1995, p. 248)—there is more about this in Chapter 1, within a discussion of art and document.

Even within the regulated, performative confines of archive-related systems, and within photography that draws on these systems, there is still abundant space for less formalized thinking, and indeed for photography to record abstract ideas. As Liam Cole Young argues, and this applies as much to visual lists as to written ones, ‘Lists are part of the stuff from which the social, the cultural, the political, and the economic, are assembled and preserved. And by turning our analytic eye towards them, we begin to see that they are not simple forms at all.’ (2017, p. 47) This kind of analytical thinking may materialize through key notions of seriality itself: it is not *only* a matter of contextualization and temporalization through relationships—although this is critical to the archive—but of using these relationships as a way to think in more abstract and wide-reaching terms about the procurement and the management of information; and even to question systems of seriality themselves. Contemporary conceptual artist-photographers are well-qualified to do this, as is demonstrated in Chapter 1.

## Art, language and instruction

Margaret Iversen places heavy emphasis on the carrying out of the instruction: ‘the instruction makes something happen, rather than describing a state of affairs’. (p. 15) But for some artists, such as those in the Fluxus group, the carrying out is not obligatory and the instruction (the score) itself may be considered as the work. La Monte Young’s early scores were performed live, but they were subsequently published; Brecht’s ‘event scores’ were mailed to friends and displayed in galleries. In these situations, were the disseminated scores meant as instructions to be carried through by the recipient at all? It is highly unlikely, and in her book *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* Liz Kotz argues—positively—that they were not: ‘this work frequently shifts away from realizable directions toward an activity that takes place mostly internally, in the act of reading or observing’. Kotz sees the Fluxus ‘event scores’ or ‘word pieces’—these two names perhaps suggest the different functions—as the way in which the score was brought

into the visual arts. This is framed as a response to John Cage: Kotz positions Cage's 1952 composition *4'33"* (in its text form), which he worked on in the second half of the 1950s, as an initiation of 'the score as an independent graphic/textual object'. But, as she suggests, the '*words to be read and actions to be performed*' [original italics] are inseparable within the scope of these text objects (pp. 59-62). G. Douglas Barrett argues that although Cage's *4'33"* embodies the ephemeral elements of performance art, 'its score is also rooted in a kind of recordkeeping' (n.p.). The very notion of recordkeeping is key to the status of Fluxus 'event scores': as well as precipitating the action, they record it for posterity. See for example Yoko Ono's instruction to Simone Morris, reproduced by Kotz (p. 59) (in what I take to be original formatting, which I have in turn maintained):

#### VOICE PIECE FOR SOPRANO

To Simone Morris

Scream.

1. against the wind
2. against the wall
3. against the sky

y.o. 1961 autumn

—Yoko Ono (1961)

Kotz provides similar examples of early 1960s instructional works from La Monte Young and George Brecht (ibid.).

The 1960s was a text-rich decade of conceptual art practice. Dan Graham's *Schema* was published in May 1969 in the first issue of the Art & Language group's *Art-Language: the Journal of Conceptual Art*. *Schema* is a text that prompts another text to be written. It is an inventory of the grammatical structure of the publication in which it is to be set, not listed by Graham himself but by the editor of the publication. There are as many versions of *Schema* as there are publications in which it appears, with each piece automatically recorded by the publishing process itself. Graham explains *Schema* thus:

*Schema* for a set of poems whose component pages are specifically published as individual poems in various magazines and collections. Each poem-page is intended to be set in its final form by the editor of the publication where it is to appear, the exact data used to correspond in each particular instance to the fact(s) of its published appearance. (p. 15)



As Graham observes in relation to *Schema*: 'The conventional linear, part-by-part reading logic is eliminated' (p. 16): thus *Schema*, in both its raw and 'performed' states, offers commentary on the structure and the function of the list.

The Art & Language group was a collective first conceived by British artists Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin around 1966. Their language-based work provided a challenging riposte to the modernist and minimalist work that was at this time mainstream, and Edward A. Shanken cites Art & Language (along with Joseph Kosuth) as 'perhaps the most persistent advocates of the use of text as a viable medium in visual art'. (p. 15) The first *Art-Language* journal produced by the group puts forward three works that materialize as instruction: Sol LeWitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art*; Graham's *Schema*; and Lawrence Weiner's *Statements*. Conceptual Art's relationship with early computing and cybernetics is evident: number 29 of LeWitt's *Sentences* reads: 'The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with' (1969, p. 13) and in an *Artforum* piece LeWitt writes: 'The idea becomes a machine that makes the art [...] the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem.' (1967, pp. 79-83) The terms 'putting into play', 'repetition', and the 'iterative character of the instruction', that are used by Iversen (p.15) when defining performativity, are likewise indicative of automation and cybernetics. In art, such automation denies the hand of the artist and Iversen discusses the 'authorial abnegation' in works such as *Ruscha's Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (p. 17); similarly, Alexander Alberro argues that in *Schema* 'the artist virtually disappears' (p. 27).

Sol LeWitt's instructional pieces, written for others to carry through, reveal the complexity of the relationship between text and corresponding image. LeWitt states in his *Sentences on Conceptual Art*: 'Ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical.' (1969, p. 11) I would argue strongly that writing words down *is* making them physical, but, in any case, LeWitt's written instructions were frequently carried out and his wall drawings were made, and they continue to be made after his death in 2007.<sup>7</sup> This is an example instruction from LeWitt:

An increasing number of horizontal lines about one inch (2.5 cm) apart from bottom to top, vertical lines from top to bottom, diagonal right lines from left to right, diagonal left lines from right to left.

7 For example, LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #157*, first drawn according to the artist's instructions by Nicholas Logsdail in 1973, was re-drawn again for the exhibition *Line* at the Lisson Gallery, London, 22 January-12 March 2016.

Reading the instruction is an entirely different experience from looking at a LeWitt wall drawing: often large scale and sometimes using rich colour, the completed drawings are the antithesis of the restrained instruction and are perceived experientially, on a very human scale, as well as conceptually. Reading LeWitt's instruction rather than looking at the ensuing wall piece is the equivalent to studying a score rather than listening to an orchestral piece or looking at a plan rather than moving around a building. Scores and plans bring different information that cannot necessarily be gleaned through experiencing the music or the building. In common with the Fluxus 'event scores', Lewitt's instructions describe and record as well as instruct, although they are very short and open-ended compared to Kenneth Goldsmith's precise and comprehensive description of Ellsworth Kelly's painting *Seine*, cited in Chapter 3. Both these texts provide alternative 'stand-alone' interfaces that we can nonetheless use to connect to the visual object.

The *Art-Language* editorial board went on to produce a series of works entitled *Index*, the first of which was displayed at Kassel in the 1972 Documenta exhibition. The piece was made up of four filing cabinets of texts surrounded by walls covered with copies of an index to these texts. Charles Harrison cites the principal design decision to be 'that the appearance of the indexing-system should be made compatible with the appearance of other indexing systems' (p. 67), in other words, not designed as art object, but taken from—and belonging to—the real world of business, technology, and of course archiving. Harrison argues that the Conceptual Art of the 1960s, including the work of the Art & Language group, should not be classed as either minimalist or dematerialized, but must be considered in relation to the *post*-minimalist climate of the time, where 'photostat statements took the place of abstract paintings, with little sense of cultural dislocation'. (p. 49) He is most likely referring here to the enlarged photostats of Joseph Kosuth's *Art as Idea* series (1966). He is also of a mind that Conceptual Art sought a 'suppression of the beholder'—and there is a connection with notions of the hidden archive here—as a social and political metaphor, set against the backdrop of the extraordinary political events of 1968. These works were not aiming for a wide audience, although, as Harrison continues, 'All art idealizes a public in some form.' (p. 61) Although the work of the Art & Language group may have seemed radical and niche at the time, and their production methods may have been modest, they did not reject the concept of the artwork. Their work is closer to Lucy Lippard's definition of Conceptual Art as 'work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or "dematerialized"'. (p. vii)

## The poetics of administration

Dan Graham describes *Schema* not as a poem in itself but decisively as a 'schema for a set of poems' (p. 15). The idea of poetry in the context of administrative and pseudo-administrative writing spheres (aka grey literature), that are popular in contemporary media circles, is not new. Lists have often been exploited in literature. Liam Cole Young argues, and this is extremely relatable to the archive catalogue, 'Literary lists of the kind crafted by Borges and Perec, or described by Eco and Benjamin, [...] tell stories—they are not unintelligible—but they do so in a way that that is strange and uncanny to the modern ear and eye.' (2017, p. 143) Robert E. Belknap, in his book *List: the Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing* remarks, also in relation to the literary list: 'The rhythm of the repetition interrupts the forward drive of the text, and for a moment we are invited to dance.' (p. xiii) Kari Kraus, echoing Young's position on the reception of language, argues that Charles Henry Middleton's nineteenth-century catalogue description of Rembrandt's etching of Dr. Faustus (discussed in Chapter 3), is 'likely to strike a reader who has grown up in a cultural milieu saturated by images [...] as peculiar in its single focus on object identification'. (p. 242) The single focus presents itself most clearly and most bizarrely in Goldsmith's *Seine*, banal and repetitive, yet rhythmic in its construction. The archive list—which Belknap would undoubtedly categorize as 'pragmatic' (everyday), rather than 'literary' (p. 3)—is a method of keeping time, both in the recordkeeping sense of *preserving* time in the archive, and in a rhythmic, poetic, *musical* context. The image description, with its limitations on language use and its system of visual content documentation, can indeed appear grey and flat—yet, at the same time, it can be manifestly poetic.

In their book *Evil Media*, Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey write about the significance of 'grayness' in media culture. They identify the reading of grey, administrative texts as one of waiting for something to happen, requiring a patience that is hardly ever rewarded:

Grayness is an affective *and* perceptual condition that is pervasive and all the more troubling for it because one never quite knows if a storm will break or the unremitting gloom will continue indefinitely. [...] The unobtrusive grayness of so many types of media practice, from system administration to data gathering or the control and verification of all sorts of qualities and attributes, calls for a kind of suspicious attentiveness, the cultivation of a sensibility able to detect minor shifts in nuance, hints of a contrast where flatness would otherwise be the rule. (p. 12 [original italics])

A blue plastic box stands on sparse grass in an open landscape. There is no indicator as to the size of the box. It has an opening lid and hook-like protrusions at the side and stands on small, triangular feet. There is a sign on the box which reads:

LIFRAENN U

Figure 5.3 Jane Birkin (2012) Still from the film *Island* at 00:03:56.  
Author's own work.

A blue plastic box stands on sparse grass in an open landscape. There is no indicator as to the size of the box. It has an opening lid and hook-like protrusions at the side and stands on small, triangular feet. There is a sign on the box which reads:

LIFRAENN URGANGUR/DYRAHRAE  
ORGANIC/DEAD ANIMALS  
BIOLOGISCHER ABF

Figure 5.4 Jane Birkin (2012) Still from the film *Island* at 00:04:08.  
Author's own work.

In archival image description nothing ever happens—it is a static situation that is being described, after all. I see this inactivity, this stasis, this flatlining, and this waiting as lying at the poetic heart of descriptive writing. Small

A blue plastic box stands on sparse grass in an open landscape. There is no indicator as to the size of the box. It has an opening lid and hook-like protrusions at the side and stands on small, triangular feet. There is a sign on the box which reads:

LIFRAENN URGANGUR/DYRAHRAE  
ORGANIC/DEAD ANIMALS  
BIOLOGISCHER ABFALL/TOTE TIERE

The sky behind is grey and cloudy and there are low hills on the horizon.

Figure 5.5 Jane Birkin (2012) Still from the film *Island* at 00:04:19.  
Author's own work.

storms do indeed break from time to time, albeit briefly. These are not the result of any embellishments in language or any other concessions to the reader but are entirely driven by the visual content that is being described.

An example of a small but discernable peak in the line can be identified in my own description of a photograph found on Flickr, one of a set images retrieved by searching the word 'island' (a fact that is fairly irrelevant here, as it stands isolated from the rest of the set). This short description manifests as a film that mimics the physical act of describing, with information delivered the viewer in a controlled way, as the description is typed in real time. It starts flatly, describing a blue plastic box (Figure 5.3), peaks at the somewhat troubling phrase 'dead animals' (Figure 5.4), and then concludes with an innocuous description of low hills and a grey sky (Figure 5.5). This example highlights another consideration: the intrinsic text in the image (the part in uppercase letters) follows archival standards: it is laid out as it appears in the image—as it is written on the blue box—with formatting (but not type style) preserved. If we are to consider the poetics, rhythm and musicality of administrative and other non-narrative texts, then the layout, whether it contains capitalization, line breaks or other typographical instances, becomes critical, hence the preservation of layout in the Yoko Ono piece above and all the archival lists and descriptions that are reproduced in this book.

The phrase ‘conceptual writing’, was devised by Craig Dworkin as a way to include the practices of conceptual artists working with text, and those of language poets. For Dworkin the term offered ‘a way both to signal literary writing that could function comfortably as conceptual art and to indicate the use of text in conceptual art practices’. (p. xxiii) Kenneth Goldsmith is a poet and artist whose readings—in parallel with those of fellow conceptual poet Christian Bök, for example—are animated and expressive, but whose writing is flat and detached, as he draws on ‘uncreative’ writing practices and administrative devices such as transcription and recordkeeping. Dworkin and Goldsmith describe the methodology for Goldsmith’s 2003 work *Day*:

*Day* (Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 2003) is a complete transcription of the entire edition of the *New York Times* from Friday, September 1, 2000. Kenneth Goldsmith predicated his procedure on the constraint of uncreativity, which he refers to as ‘the hardest constraint a writer can muster’. He systematically worked through each page, moving from one article to the next. Anywhere in the newspaper where there was a word, letter, or number, he transcribed it. He made no distinction between editorial and advertisement. Finally, when published, everything was set in the same font, without the use of styling such as bold or italic. The result is a levelling of information to text, which is stripped of hierarchy and design. (p. 249)

The decision to do the opposite of what is done in the *Island* description and in archive description generally, to remove the formatting of the original newspaper rather than preserve it—although Goldsmith does choose to keep the paragraph breaks and capitalization—makes for a dense reading experience. The process and materiality of form is itself lost somewhat in *Day*, as it does away with the newspaper format that is itself a hangover from the days of moveable type. We are aware that *Day* involved transcription; the words were not simply copied from one digital space to another; thus, it represents a substantial and time-consuming act of appropriation.

The writing process and the hybridity between technology and human operator is magnified in Jack Kerouac’s epic 36.6 metre *On the Road* scroll, produced in the course of three weeks in 1951 and shown in its entirety at the British Library in 2012. The scroll provides insight into the nature of the typescript, with its corrections, obliterations and handwritten marks and instructions for the moving of text, as well as signs of the technical problems Kerouac encountered, such as the uneven paper feed, which necessitated the adjustment of the tab every metre or so, all exacerbated by the length of the ‘page’. The evidence of this kind of physical interaction

is now more or less extinct as these human and mechanical practices are rendered invisible in documents written on computers, with consequences for language use. Goldsmith explains:

In today's digital world, language has become a provisional space, temporary and debased, mere material to be shovelled, reshaped, and molded into whatever form is convenient, only to be discarded just as quickly. [...] Notions of the authentic or original are increasingly untraceable. (2011, p. 218)

Goldsmith's concerns can be traced back, technologically speaking. In his discourse on the hand and the typewriter in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Friedrich Kittler describes how the typewriter causes an insidious shift in writing practice, as type is 'set' with the same decisiveness as it is in the printing press and argues, 'The typewriter veils the essence of writing and of the script. It withdraws from man the essential rank of the hand' (p. 198). Although typewriter and computer keyboard still employ the human hand (and indeed the digits), the *evidence* of the hand has decreased with each innovation. The 'setting' of type via the typewriter can be seen as both an original and a final act: original in that it exists in its first and only iteration as object, and final in that it cannot be changed (only rewritten as a different object) hence the word 'set'. Darren Wershler-Henry argues that 'typewriting *was* writing. Its logic shaped not only written documents, but also bodies, workplaces and practices, institutions and politics.' (p. 16 [original italics]) Many archive descriptions that remain today were originally typewritten, and this is perhaps another reason why such an efficient, prescribed and cautious language developed and thrived in archival and other governmental and institutional recording systems. And the unsystematic order in which objects in an image are described may at least partly be down to the writer's inability to edit the typewritten text, the inability to reorder. Jussi Parikka provides an explanation of how language is so subservient to media, as are we, as writers:

language in the age of technological media is not just natural language: it is the technological and physical regimes introduced by media, such as the typewriter, and later computer software languages, which [...] impose new regimes of sensation and use to which we have to accommodate ourselves in order to be functioning subjects. We are secondary to such systems. (2012, p. 70)

The lack of freedom to scrawl and edit was a transforming feature of the typewriter as opposed to the hand. This is a freedom that is in part regained

with word processing, where type is not committed letter by letter and nothing is really ever 'set' until the document is deployed. However, the infinite opportunity for editing text brings its own problems, as original thought streams are lost and texts are over-written, perhaps in both senses. There is a danger of a kind of overworking that was not possible in the days of the typewriter.

In an epic act of transcription, in May 2008 Simon Morris began to retype a page a day from Kerouac's *On the Road* book on his blog, entitled 'Getting inside Jack Kerouac's Head'. Goldsmith describes Simon Morris's retyping of *On the Road* as 'raising the craft of the copyist to the same level as the author [...] a utopian critique of labour and value' (2011, p. 12). He describes how Morris 'gets inside' the text (or inside Kerouac's head) (2011, p. 151) and draws on the work of Walter Benjamin to do so. Benjamin writes in *Reflections*

The power of a country road is different when one is walking along it from when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands. (1978, p. 66)

Benjamin is arguing here that the airplane passenger (reader) is privy to the wider context of the work, whereas the walker (copier) sees only the immediate text in detail and so experiences its power as material object. This same conceptual divide comes into play in the transcription of archive manuscripts, where the expert labour of palaeographic analysis and transcription by the archivist is perceived as very different to the labour of historical and contextual analysis by the researcher. In common with archival transcription, the retyping of *On the Road* is an operation in which text is not analysed but is handled in material terms; and it is a process of recordkeeping and even one of counting. For example, Morris notes the use of hyphens in the book, and he counts the number of times the phrase 'on the road' is used (Goldsmith 2011, p. 152). Morris' remediation of *On the Road* is a work that sheds light on its own development (Vismann p. 8), as does Kerouac's typewritten original. The development of Morris' work, the step by step release of already existing text, even echoes the cataloguing of archive objects.

Canadian poet Sarah Dowling uncompromisingly states, 'I come to conceptual writing with a scholarly interest in description.' And she probes the relationship between description and appropriation:



Appropriation calls up questions similar to description, which it has often sought to supplant: does appropriation function as literary ideology critique, skewering and depleting the quoted text? Or does it offer a flat re-presentation that ultimately assents to and reproduces the same structures? (p. 253)

Dowling's question is an important one when applied to image and description. Does depletion occur? Does the text skewer the image? What is clear to me is that, in order for description to function in its role as finding aid and also to embody the poetics of grey media and conceptual writing, the two media must be regarded as different but nonetheless equal, as are the *Day* transcription and Morris' *On the Road* re-write (even though Kerouac's original enjoys an heroic status). Goldsmith argues the case for transcription as something more than a flat re-presentation, or an even equivalence: 'it is a writing imbued with celebration, its eyes ablaze with enthusiasm for the future, embracing this moment as one pregnant with possibility'. (2011, p. 4)

Transcription and appropriation, as seen in *Day*, figure again in Goldsmith's 2013 publication *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*. This time he transcribes radio reports (jingles included) of catastrophic events such as the Kennedy assassinations and the Challenger space shuttle disaster. More recently (in March 2015) Goldsmith's techniques caused a major controversy, as he performed *The Body of Michael Brown*, a reading of the autopsy report of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old black man who was fatally shot by a white police officer. Goldsmith, a white male poet, was accused of racist exploitation, and he received death threats for this (as well as some appreciation from the audience for even starting the conversation around Brown's wretched and untimely death). Goldsmith defended his work, arguing that it was in the tradition of *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*:

I took a publicly available document from an American tragedy that was witnessed first-hand (in this case by the doctor performing the autopsy) and simply read it. Like *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*, I did not editorialize; I simply read it without commentary or additional editorializing ... The document I read from is powerful. My reading of it was powerful. How could it be otherwise? Such is my long-standing practice of conceptual writing: like *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*, the document speaks for itself in ways that an interpretation cannot. It is a horrific American document, but then again it was a horrific American death. (quoted in Flood, n.p.)

Goldsmith claims to be performing what already exists, and what already exists may be unpalatable. In this respect there is a parallel to archival

processes: material that is inherently unpleasant—and there is plenty of this in archives—must of course be catalogued and preserved in the same detached way as everything else.

Works such as *Day, Seven American Deaths and Disasters* and, more especially *Fidget* (2000)—where Goldsmith records his every movement during a thirteen-hour period on Bloomsday (16 June) 1997—make for difficult reading. But none of these are as difficult as Vito Acconci's *Removal, Move (Line of Evidence): The Grid Locations of Streets Alphabetized, Hagstrom's Map of the Five Boroughs: 3. Manhattan*. The first two lines read: 'J12 G13 G12 B11 K9 B11 F11 F14 D13 D6 C14 F2 A9 A9 B10 A9 C14 J9 B12 B12 C12 C12 C12 C12 C12 D13 D13 D13 D13 D13 D14 D14 C5 D14' (reproduced in Dworkin and Goldsmith, p. 22), and the piece continues in exactly the same way for five pages. These texts all fall into what Goldsmith identifies as a category of conceptual writing that attracts a 'thinkership', rather than 'readership' (2012, n.p.) meaning that once the writing system is understood, one does not need to read the whole text. Thus, we are spared from reading of Acconci's piece in its entirety, although we can admire it for its exactitude. Fiona Banner's 1000-page publication *The Nam* (1997), a descriptive compilation of six Vietnam films, also fits into this category. It even states on her website: 'It has been described as unreadable.'<sup>8</sup> This is not strictly true, of course: the language is not difficult and, if we are literate English speakers, we can read it and understand the narratives that exactly reflect those of the films described. However, the text is continuous, with no paragraph breaks, and whether we would be inclined to do more than flip through it, or read *about* it, is a different matter altogether. Of course, this is exactly the way that we first approach many texts that we would label as conventional and meant for reading in their totality.

Although there are manifest links between image description and conceptual writing, image descriptions inside the archive are there to be read and to be understood in terms of real world situations that may advance a certain field of research. Even though there is an element of conceptual thought required—as texts need to be thought of in terms of images and other archive objects—the reading of catalogue listings and descriptions can be laborious, especially if one is not appreciative of their poetic attributes—and users of archives probably are not. Ben Highmore in his article 'Listlessness in the Archive' puts forward a different mode of reading archives (and lists in particular):

Archives are lists and lists are often archives and archived. Those that work on lists and on archives constantly battle the fatigue of too many

8 <http://www.fionabanner.com/vanitypress/thenamhb/> (Accessed 13 December 2019)

lists, of too much exhaustiveness. But could exhaustion be embraced as a necessary mood with which to deal with lists and archives? Might listlessness be something of a methodological orientation that has its own productivity in the face of so many lists? (n.p.)

Perhaps Highmore's strategy falls somewhere between Goldsmith's thinker-ship and readership, between weighing and reading, as we let our minds wander and surface in the face of grey texts. Perhaps as readers of such texts we create our own peaks.

In literary theory, narratologists regard description (outside of traditional ekphrasis) not as poetic—and not even as particularly productive—but rather as a low form of writing. Description experiences, as D.P. Fowler puts it, 'poor relation status' (p. 27). Yet over recent years it has gathered more attention as a form, with a special issue of the journal *Representations* (Summer 2016) focusing on description across the disciplines, taking in practical uses such as audio description for a visually impaired audience, the efficacy of descriptive practices in psychology, as well as in a literary context. In their opening article, 'Building a Better Description', editors Sharon Marcus *et al* ask that we should 'consider [description] on its own terms and not as a stepping-stone on the way to interpretation and critique'. (p. 3) Similarly, D.P. Fowler calls for a celebration of description, a raising of its status, and he argues, 'the more radical move is to free description from the chains of slavery and to give it true autonomy' (pp. 26-27). He cites *nouveau romancier* Alain Robbe-Grillet as a proponent of this approach, who states 'instead of this universe of "significations" (psychological, social, functional), one must try to construct a world more solid, more *immediate*' (quoted in Halsall, p. 27 [original italics]). The *Nouveau Roman* writers of 1950s and 1960s France, such as Robbe-Grillet and Georges Perec (Perec was also part of the Oulipo group), turned away from the popular existentialist writing of their contemporaries and instead used descriptive techniques in order to afford an equality of denotation that meant that nothing was signified at all. For example, In Perec's book *Things: A Story of the Sixties*, the *things* in the lives of the central characters Jérôme and Sylvie, are scrupulously described; the characters are viewed through their possessions and their surroundings, both existing and desired, with the things that they desire not marked out as such in the narrative, but by Perec's use of the conditional tense:

The second door would reveal a study. From top to bottom the walls would be lined with books and periodicals with, here and there, so as to break the continuity of bindings and jackets, a number of prints, drawings and photographs—Antonello da Messina's *Saint Jerome*, a detail from The

*Triumph of Saint George*, one of Piranesi's dungeons, a portrait by Ingres, a little pen and ink landscape by Klee, a sepia-tint photograph of Renan in his room at the Collège de France, a Steinberg department store, Cranach's *Melanchthon*—pinned to the wooden panels set into the shelving. Slightly to the left of the window and at a shallow angle would be a long country table covered with a large red blotter. (pp. 23-24)

Perec's repetitive listing of objects and situations render them, and therefore Jérôme and Sylvie's material desires, quite insignificant.

Alain Robbe-Grillet explains that his 'cine-novel', *The Immortal One* (a semi-technical transformation from film to text, or to be more precise, from script to imagined film to text, as the text preceded the film), can be read without seeing the film, 'in the same way as a musical score; what is then communicated is a wholly mental experience, whereas the work itself is intended to be a primarily sensual experience, and this aspect of it can never really be replaced'. (pp. 5-6) Working with image description is working on the borders of the experiential, between sensational image and seemingly dry text. The act of describing becomes a vehicle for the examination of the photographic image that is beyond traditional representation and hermeneutics, but the description itself, in spite of its being a straightforward, evidence-based form, *can* be poetic, *can* embody certain aesthetic qualities, although these qualities may be different to those embodied in the image itself.

Taking the more radical approach to description that D.P. Fowler demands, where 'objects are given a role outside of any metaphorical or metonymic system' (p. 27), writers such as Robbe-Grillet and Perec produce radical texts whilst operating within a literary framework. Institutional description writing is not radical *per se* and does not attempt to be radical; it is simply an accepted and operational procedure within the archive that happens to result in an unfamiliar and idiosyncratic form. A transformation takes place through its transportation out of the semi-private space of the archive institution into a new place and a new framework—such as into a conceptual art practice—where it is altogether less familiar. It is with this move into a more public space that it *becomes* radicalized. Jacques Rancière questions the relationship between the 'ordinariness' of work and artistic 'exceptionality', and he cites how, in Plato's third book of *The Republic*, the artist, or mimetician, 'provides a public stage for the private principle of work' (pp. 39-40); that is, artists make their work visible and thus it becomes art. All this is consistent with the way in which Ruscha defines his photographs as 'ready-mades' (Coplans, p. 25): both the 'ordinariness' of the activity (driving along a road and taking photos) and the 'ordinariness' of

the product (the snapshot-like photos themselves) are transformed through their publication in an artist's book. The Hampshire Roads Survey on the other hand, stays where it is, in the archive box.

## Works cited

- Alberro, A. (1998). Structure as Content: Dan Graham's *Schema* (March 1966) and the Emergence of Conceptual Art. In G. Moure (Ed.), *Dan Graham* (pp. 21-29). Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona y Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela.
- Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Banner, F. (1997). *The Nam*. London: Frith Street Books.
- Barrett, G. D. (2013). The Limits of Performing Cage: Ultra-red's SILENT/LISTEN. *Postmodern Culture*, 23/2. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/> [Accessed 26 November 2018]
- Belknap, R. (2004). *List: the Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Benjamin, W. (1978). *Reflections*. New York: Schocken.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico.
- Boym, S. (2008). *Architecture of the Off-Modern*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Butler, J. (2003) Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. In A. Jones (Ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (pp. 392-401). London: Routledge.
- Campany, D. (2003). *Art and Photography*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Coplans, J. (1965). Concerning 'Various Small Fires': Edward Ruscha Discusses his Perplexing Publications. *Artforum*, February 1965, 24-25.
- Dowling, S. (2012). From *Hinterland B*. In C. Bergvall, L. Browne, T. Carmody & V. Place (Eds.), *I'll Drown My Book* (pp. 248-253). Los Angeles: Les Figues Press.
- Dworkin, C. & Goldsmith, K. (Eds.). (2011). *Against Expression: an Anthology of Conceptual Writing*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Ernst, W. (2001). Art of the Archive. In C. Weber (Ed.), *Art. Archive: New Works on Historical Holdings* (pp. 93-101). Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.
- Ernst, W. (2002). Archive in Transition. In B. Von Bismark, H.-P. Feldmann, H.U. Obrist, D. Stoller & U. Wuggenig (Eds.), *Interarchive* (pp. 475-484). Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung.
- Flood, A. (2015). US Poet Defends Reading of Michael Brown Autopsy Report as a Poem. *The Guardian*, March 17, 2015. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/17/michael-brown-autopsy-report-poem-kenneth-goldsmith> [Accessed 22 November 2017]

- Flusser, V. (2011). *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foster, H. (2004). An Archival Impulse. *October*, 110, 3-22.
- Fowler, D.P. (1991). Narrate and Describe: the Problem of Ekphrasis. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 81, 25-35.
- Fuller, M. & Goffey, A. (2012). *Evil Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Goldsmith, K. (2000). *Fidget*. Toronto: Coach House Books.
- Goldsmith, K. (2003). *Day*. Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures.
- Goldsmith, K. (2011). *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Goldsmith, K. (2012). Conceptual Writing: A Worldview. *Poetry Foundation*. Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/04/conceptual-writing-a-worldview> [Accessed 17 July 2018]
- Goldsmith, K. (2013). *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*. Brooklyn, NY: Powerhouse Books.
- Graham, D. (1969). Poem Schema. *Art-Language: the Journal of Conceptual Art*, 1/1, 14-16.
- Halsall, A. (1988). 'La Transition', Description et Ambiguités Narrativo-Discursives dans 'Victoire' de William Faulkner. In J. Bessière (Ed.), *L'Ordre du Descriptif* (n.2). Paris: PU de France.
- Harrison, C. (1991). *Essays on Art & Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Highmore, B. (2012). Listlessness in the Archive. *M/C Journal*, 15 [Online]. Available at: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/546> [Accessed 26 June 2018]
- Iversen, M. (2010). Auto-Maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography. In D. Costello M. E. Iversen (Eds.), *Photography after Conceptual Art* (pp. 12-27). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kittler, F. A. (1999). *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Kotz, L. (2010). *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kraus, K. (2013). Picture Criticism: Textual Studies and the Image. In N. Fraistat and J. Flanders (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship* (pp. 236-256). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LeWitt, S. (1967). Paragraphs on Conceptual Art. *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10, Summer 1967, 79-83.
- LeWitt, S. (1969). Sentences on Conceptual Art. *Art-Language: the Journal of Conceptual Art*, 1/1, 11-13.
- Lippard, L. (2001). *Six Years: The Dematerialization Of the Art Object From 1966-1972: A Cross-Reference Book of Information on some Esthetic Boundaries: Consisting of a Bibliography into which are Inserted a Fragmented Text, Art Works, Documents, Interviews, and Symposia, Arranged Chronologically and Focused on So-Called*

- Conceptual or Information or Idea Art with Mentions of such Vaguely Designated Areas as Minimal, Anti-Form, Systems, Earth, or Process Art, Occurring Now in The Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (With Occasional Political Overtones)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marcus, S., Love, H. & Best, S. (2016). Building a Better Description. *Representations* 135/1, 1-21.
- Menkman, R. (2011). *The Glitch Moment(um)*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- Parikka, J. (2012). *What is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Parikka, J. (2015). *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Perec, G. (2011). *Things: A Story of the Sixties*. London: Vintage. (First published in 1965 in French under the title *Les Choses*).
- Rancière, J. (2013). *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. (1971). *The Immortal One*. London: Calder & Boyars.
- Ruscha, A. (1969). *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. Alhambra, California: Cunningham Press.
- Sanouillet, M. & Petersen. (Eds.) (1975). *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Shanken, E. A. (2003). From Cybernetics to Telematics: the Art, Pedagogy, and Theory of Roy Ascott. In E. A. Shanken (Ed.), *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (pp. 1-95). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Skrebowski, L. (2010). Productive Misunderstandings: Interpreting Mel Bochner's Theory of Photography. In D. Costello & M. E. Iversen (Eds.), *Photography after Conceptual Art* (pp. 86-107). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- van Dijck, J. (2007). *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Vinegar, A. (2010). Ed Ruscha, Heidegger and Deadpan Photography. In D. Costello & M. E. Iversen (Eds.), *Photography after Conceptual Art* (pp. 28-49). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Vismann, C. (2008). *Files: Law, Media and Technology*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Wall, J. (1995). 'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art. In A. Goldsteinn & A. Rorimer (Eds.), *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1995* (pp. 246-247). Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Wershler-Henry, D. S. (2005). *The Iron Whim: a Fragmented History of Typewriting*. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Ltd.
- Young, L.C. (2017). *List Cultures: Knowledge and Poetics from Mesopotamia to Buzzfeed*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

## 6 Afterword: the post-digital archive

### Abstract

The final chapter revisits themes and arguments from the viewpoint of the post-digital milieu. Borrowing a metaphor from screen- and computer-based technologies, the chapter frames the archive as an enduring 'interface', 'a hard back-up' that has stood the test of time. Conversely, the metaphorical uses of archival and administrative terms in discussions of the network are commonplace, including the word 'archive' itself. Various metaphors are questioned as to their viability, with 'memory' given special attention. The enduring efficacy of the catalogue, and especially of object-level description, is emphasized. With many archive images remaining undigitized, description prevails as an effective tool for affording visibility. Importantly, it exists independently, as an idiosyncratic and poetic way of writing and reading the image.

**Keywords:** back-up; memory; metaphor; paper; post-digital; stasis

Digital systems are constantly changing in terms of software, hardware, network storage and advances in the field of artificial intelligence. Given this, we can never be entirely post-digital in our outlook—if we are to think of this overused prefix as suggesting a simple 'after' in chronological terms, which is up for debate.<sup>1</sup> What is important is that we are at least in a position where the digital is so embedded in our lives that we are able to offer some critique: we are able to look back at the evolution of the digital, know it better and identify comparisons between analogue and digital systems that might be useful to our understanding of where we are now. Analogue systems such as the stable operational structures of the physical archive can help us to recognize and therefore more successfully navigate the strengths and weaknesses of the digital landscape. There are

<sup>1</sup> See for example the short post by Patrick Lichty in the 'community' section of *Rhizome* classic. <http://classic.rhizome.org/discuss/view/208495/> [Accessed 2 February 2019]



many—media-archaeological and other—connections between archive systems and those of the network, in terms of storage, preservation, and search and retrieval—and by way of the shared language and metaphors used, in particular the rather liberal use of the word ‘archive’. Furthermore, we find that issues that have always been prevalent in the archive, such as preservation, ownership, copyright, privacy, and contextual integrity, can now be found at the centre of debates around the management of networks.

### **‘Archive’ as metaphor for everything**

An experienced and erudite archivist once told me that the word ‘archive’ should never be used as a verb. This idea would seem to be entirely unacceptable to us at a time when the word is used daily in the context of the organization of digital objects of all kinds, and even reaches into the arrangement, storage and care of the physical objects that we have around us in our daily lives. Yet Wolfgang Ernst perceives the use of the word ‘archive’, in digital culture at least, as metaphorical and idiosyncratic (2002, p. 476), and he takes this further: ‘If we disregard the metaphorical use of the word archive for all possible forms of memory and cultural memory and use it to mean the specific agency of memory technology, the Internet is not an archive.’ He concedes that the Internet can extend the space of archive—an important point here, as I am not advocating a Luddite dismissal of the digitization of archive objects or arguing against the spread or reach of archives, and I am absolutely in favour of the notion of open access in general terms. But Ernst cites the temporary nature of the Internet, together with its indifference to content, as key points that differentiate the physical and the internet-based ‘archive’ (2013, pp. 84–85). He maintains that cyberspace ‘is not even a space, but rather a topological configuration’ (2002, p. 482), but of course it does require a physical storage space, as has been well documented by Google in their so-called secret glimpse into ‘where the internet lives’ (Philipson). The images that Google provides of their storage facilities show spaces that share many attributes with the physical archive: rows of shelves and numbered bays echo traditional archival storage and engender feelings of archival stasis and stability, bringing a familiar materiality and a confidence in how and where our data are stored.

Lev Manovich and Jeremy Douglass argue that we ‘have “been digital” on a theoretical level for a very long time’, in terms of employing categorization to ‘theorize, preserve and exhibit’ our cultural knowledge (n.p.). This observation is made with regard to the organization of materials in

museums, but it also applies to libraries and archives. The archive, with its emphasis on the separation of materials into discrete numbered units, and its application of a hierarchical, list-based object management system, can certainly be perceived as a prototype for internet media storage and ‘archiving’ techniques. Thus, the word ‘archive’, as noun *and* verb, has become accepted, rightly or wrongly, as part and parcel of our digital vocabulary. Jussi Parikka explains: ‘We see this in ways ranging from the replacement of “Delete” or “Trashcan” on our email screens with “Archive” to attempts to offer new kinds of storage space—mistakenly conflated with “archives”—for the numerous traces we leave of our personal lives’ (2013, pp. 1-2). We are generally quite happy to go along with this idea of a transitional storage arrangement for those things we do not want to see in our personal digital space everyday but do not want to lose altogether; ‘archiving’ seems like a very neat option, one that is far less final than deleting and requires less in the way of decision-making. And it is not in the interests of corporations for us to actually delete our data, after all; better for them that we hive it off out of sight and mind in the digital attic. And we have all heard of, or experienced, how it is almost impossible to prise ourselves—and our countless digital traces—from the clutches of Facebook, for example. So, as we choose to ‘archive’ our emails and documents, other personal data is being ‘archived’ for us.

The issue of where our data are stored, both on our own hard drives and in networked spaces, is mostly beyond our control. We confidently move things from one folder to another on our desktops or mobile devices, through a filing hierarchy that follows a similar cascading container-based formula of folders and files to that of the physical archive or the traditional office filing system. Cornelia Vismann recognizes a certain nostalgia for tactile storage systems when she states, ‘The very terminology of computer surfaces is designed to remind users seated before screens of the familiar world of files’ (p. 163); the imagining and understanding of space and physicality through the archive catalogue interface, as discussed in Chapter 3, extends to digital interfaces as well. But these systems only mimic archival storage systems; the networked storage of files is complex and distinctly anarchival. The terminology and the structure of the interface comes out of archival arrangement and returns back to it on the desktop from the very differently ordered space of the network; Ernst, using another metaphor from physical storage systems, describes information stored on the Internet as ‘quirky, transient and chaotically shelved’ (2002, p. 482). The archivist’s attempt to protect the word ‘archive’ needs to be understood against the backdrop of this wide-ranging metaphorical use of the term, which extends also

to the words 'document', 'file' and 'folder', all abstracted and metaphorical uses that could be perceived as undermining the value of the static and reliable material storage systems of the archive institution.

## Memory and metaphor

Another term that has successfully migrated as a metaphor from the archival to the digital sphere is that of 'memory'. José van Dijck (p. 30) evocatively explains how the library and archive were once used as metaphors to explain human memory, as one 'searches through the stacks from which stored and unchanged information can be retrieved and read'. However, she goes on to describe how this paradigm has been countered by scholars such as Henri Bergson who argues in his 1896 work *Matter and Memory* that the brain does not store memory at all, but re-creates the past on demand (Bergson, p. 197). Furthermore, Ernst, reflecting on Freud's ideas (in his letter to Fleiss, dated December 6 1896) about the occasional reconfiguration of the order of human memory, argues that the way things are stored and retrieved on networks 'turns out to be closer to human neuronal memory than to cultural memory agencies' (2013, p. 101). In this respect, as van Dijck explains using new metaphors, 'the brain is less a reservoir than a telephone system' (p. 30).

Yet archives are still perceived as gatekeepers of human memory and are often termed as 'memory institutions'. What is worrying about this particular label is the implied institutionalization of memory, the idea that the pockets of information contained in the archive give definitive answers; fixed, institutional narratives that are universally shared, set in time, static, and cannot be contested. This is a notion that I strongly dispute in this book. Ernst argues that we should see the archive 'not as a coherent depository for memory supply but instead identify its multiplicity of temporal layers' (2016, p. 12). Archives exist for us as layers (although I prefer the term 'units', as it does away entirely with any chronological implications) of diachronic historical evidence that can be continually revisited, and always against the backdrop of our contemporary thinking. This applies as much to photographs as it does to anything else. Even though I frequently emphasize the static nature of the documents themselves, tied to their place by the catalogue, I present them as dynamic objects, units that are waiting to be reconfigured, as Ernst also posits (2002, p. 145). This view positions them firmly in the space of the present—and the future—not as a memory or an illusion of the past but as a living, material reality.

Debra Ramsay identifies the archive as ‘an easy metaphor’ for memory, one that is pervasive in archival literature, but one that is problematic as it obscures the complexity of both archive *and* memory. She notes how the idea of *collective* memory commonly features in discussions of memory and archive, which she argues ‘feeds smoothly into the notion that organisations and nations have “memory”’. (The institutional memory that I contest above.) Wholly recognizing the fluidity and the diversity of cultural and historical material contained in the archival system, Ramsay suggests that it is more useful to regard memory as ‘a process that takes place within a complex system, or ecology’. (pp. 282-283) Through consideration of the networked or social ‘archive’, Michelle Henning equally recognizes the importance of image ecosystems in materializing memory. Whilst reiterating ‘photography’s historical function as a form of prosthetic or artificial memory’, Henning states that by putting images in a networked photostream, for example on Flickr or inside Apple’s photo storage system, we can begin to challenge this view:

We take photographs to remember, but also to circumvent or attempt to halt the relentless flow of time. But by placing them in a ‘stream’ we are invited to think differently about this flow. Each photograph comes accompanied by metadata, recording precisely where, when and on what devices the photograph was taken. Once ‘posted’ or ‘shared’ it accrues more metadata in the form of ‘likes’, tags, ratings and so on. This database promises greater accuracy than our own non-automated systems for archival storage and our flawed and subjective human memories. (pp. 132-133)

Images are frequently assessed in this book as sets, both through their relationship to each other and to their place in the system as a whole. The detached recordkeeping aspect of archival image description and the adherence to original order ensures that false, assumed or subjective memories are at least not projected into the catalogue list.

Computer memory is something that we are now familiar with, as one of the specifications that we largely associate with computational performance rather than directly with concepts of ‘remembering’, even though remembering and recall is at the heart of it. Wendy Chun argues: ‘A major—if not the major—category of new media is memory’ and she cites examples of common language used in computing such as read-only memory, random-access memory, and of course the now ubiquitous memory stick. Chun emphasizes the importance of memory in computing, in respect of it being the thing that allowed the leap from the comparatively simple

calculator to the computer as we now know it. She also argues that *content* on the Internet 'is similarly shot through with memory', although such content may not always be memorable in itself (pp. 97). In this respect, the comparison to the archive is a perfect one.

## The physical as a back-up for the digital

The notion of the physical archive as a secure back-up to the network might at first seem perverse: should it not be the other way around, with the digital as back-up for the physical? Is this not what digitization is all about? But, the notion of digitization as an alternative to the preservation of original objects is not seen as a safe or workable alternative, due to the problems of changing hardware and software—or even the fear of catastrophic breakdown of networks and systems of digital storage. In contrast to this, the physical archive provides a static, closely monitored and ordered environment that is specifically designed to endure. In his book *Post-Digital Print* Alessandro Ludovico argues that digital is built for speed and print for stability (p. 7), and of course digital content can be quick and easy to access from anywhere at any time (notwithstanding the restrictions and problems of paywalls and patchy internet connections).

In terms of the catalogue, there are more options: as well as the networked archival catalogue systems that prioritize interoperability over original context, the 'paper' catalogue is a static form that is frequently deposited on archive websites, usually as a PDF. It is downloadable, searchable and printable, but the information contained is fixed in place and tamper-proof, thus preserving archival contexts, hierarchies and relationships. Lisa Gitelman identifies the PDF as a kind of halfway house, a bridge between print and digital, as it is a static rather than a 'living' object and has 'the look of printedness' (pp. 113–114). However, in terms of the duplication of the objects themselves, in anticipation of a major disaster in the physical archive, such as fire, flood, earthquake, or the wanton destruction through warfare that is unfortunately becoming more common, the ideal back-up to the material archive is still an analogue one: that is, to produce microfilm facsimiles (although the technology to do this has disappeared from many archives, as has been previously discussed). Microfilm is a storage medium that cannot be wiped or overwritten, and one that needs only basic technology to view. For added security, microfilms (and original materials) can be stored in repositories such as the 'DeepStore' facility, and there is more on this in Chapter 4.



Figure 6.1 Kenneth Goldsmith *Printing out the Internet*, Labor Gallery, Mexico City (2013). Courtesy of the artist and Labor Gallery.

Ludovico recognizes that the main problem of physical storage systems is that of space (p. 133). This is indeed a problem for archives that are based in increasingly cash-strapped institutions such as universities, where both space and labour is at a premium. In Chapter 4, I identify the particular problem of keeping photographic slides and negatives, as they require costly and space hungry storage systems such as specialized freezers, ideally situated in spaces specially built for volatile materials, away from other archive objects. These are the materials that are most likely to be digitized and destroyed, but other objects are facing disposal (or rejection in the first place) due to lack of storage space that leads to an inevitable tightening of acquisitions policies.

In 2013 Kenneth Goldsmith embarked on a project called *Printing out the Internet*, (Figure 6.1) He invited the general public to send printouts of Internet content to the Labor Gallery in Mexico City. 20,000 people responded and eventually the ten tons of material gathered filled a room of 1000 square metres. Indeed, as Ludovico points out: 'In the first case, the question we are invited to reflect upon is mostly one of scale: the content which was invisibly registered on magnetic memory becomes excessively abundant once it is rendered physically.' (ibid.) But Goldsmith's project flagged up other differences between physical and digital material, outside of the obvious issues of space that the project successfully visualized. The printouts

included copyrighted material such as that from academic articles retrieved by individuals from databases such as JSTOR, facing issues of copyright and pay walls head-on (as does Goldsmith's long-term project UbuWeb<sup>2</sup>) and the project was further framed as a memorial to Aaron Swartz.<sup>3</sup> It was an extremely controversial venture in environmental terms and it prompted a petition on the website change.org entitled 'Please don't print the internet'. Orit Gat, in an article on rhizome.org in May 2014 frames the project as 'a comment on the economies of circulation and dissemination (versus privatization) of knowledge on the internet', but Gat suggests that in the end it played on people's fears of the instability of networked content and the enduring trust they hold in printing as a mode of preservation (2014, n.p.).

Physical archives may indeed be space hungry, accommodating many miles of shelving, but the reality of the space and energy needs of *networked* storage is now very apparent. This is something of a worry for large media corporations, in terms of the high cost to the companies of running data storage centres, together with public awareness of the environmental consequences. After discovering that 82 per cent of their traffic was centred on only eight per cent of uploaded photographs, Facebook recently announced that they plan to initiate a 'cold storage' system (yet another metaphor) for older and lesser used photographs. By squeezing data and using energy-efficient cooling systems, they estimate that this system would require only a quarter of the energy of standard Facebook storage, whilst still allowing users instant access to their images.<sup>4</sup>

Archives too are addressing the problem of the energy used to run the necessary environmental control systems. The Keep, a large archive near Brighton (already mentioned in Chapter 3 in terms of its massive storage capacity) uses environmentally friendly systems such as photovoltaic cells, rainwater harvesting, super-insulation, living roofs, and daylight lit spaces wherever possible. The Keep was one of the first archive buildings in the UK

2 Ubuweb was founded by Kenneth Goldsmith in 1996 in response to the problems of distribution of avant-garde material that is largely out of print, together with film and sound collections. It exists as a non-commercial and freely accessible educational resource, with no affiliation to any university or other institution. Ubuweb can be found at <http://www.ubu.com> [Accessed 6 February 2019]

3 Aaron Swartz was a programmer and hacktivist and was the founder of the news site Reddit, amongst other things. He was arrested by police at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2011 under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, after setting a computer to automatically download articles from JSTOR. Swartz hanged himself in his Brooklyn apartment in January 2011, after rejecting a plea bargain and so facing a long prison sentence.

4 <https://www.datacenterknowledge.com/archives/2013/01/18/facebook-builds-new-data-centers-for-cold-storage> [Accessed 13 April 2019]

to achieve a rating of 'excellent' from BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method). Additionally, the advanced Building Management System that houses the environmental control systems at The Keep is located at the bottom of the building, physically accessible and directly adjustable. Think also again of archive storage in salt mines, where the environment is naturally maintained: the temperature is kept down by dint of being underground and the presence of salt maintains the appropriate humidity.

## Paper as knowledge

Paper is the fundamental material on which archives and their storage and cataloguing systems are based, and Ludovico argues that paper is 'a stable extension of human memory, "platform-independent" though physically limited' (p. 126). This is concomitant with the notion that the decay in software/hardware systems is material, latent and quite inescapable. Paper, especially older paper, is, on the other hand, sturdy and very resilient to change. In his book *Paper Machine*, Derrida perceives paper itself as nothing short of multimedia. He celebrates the 'possibilities of paper' (2005, p. 47), and the haptic interface of the book, 'the thickness and the resistance of a sheet—its folds, the back of its recto-verso, the *fantasies* of contact' (ibid., pp. 62–63 [original italics]). Comparisons are frequently made between Derrida's book *Glas*<sup>5</sup> (1974) and the notion of hypertext, a computing term that is in turn often associated with the concept of intertextuality, or inter-relationships between texts, a notion that is critical to the understanding of an archive.

When Derrida wrote *Paper Machine* in 2001 (first published in French), he perceived paper as on the wane, 'paper is *declining*, it is getting smaller, it is shrinking inexorably at the rate that a man grows old'. (2005, p. 42) Today

5 *Glas* is a combined reading of Hegel's philosophy and Jean Genet's autobiographical writing, with two columns of text are set in distinctly different fonts and different type sizes—and there are further inset blocks of text, which can be taken to be notes, or marginalia. But these notes are sometimes several pages long and abruptly cut into the text to which they relate. These can be read discretely, as can the other two texts. There are historical precedents to this; for example, early imprints of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, like *Glas*, also present a text within a text. In a copy from 1520, Dante's words are broken up by inserted blocks of text—a commentary by Christoforo Landino (1424–1504)—set in a larger font. Landino's commentary can also be read independently; as an example of the Renaissance language of Florence, it is a rich linguistic source in its own right.



we are a little more optimistic. Although we are by necessity immersed in the digital in so many ways, we have developed a renewed feeling for the material in general terms, and the archive has a part to play in this. The longing for the degraded object that is described in Chapter 5 is indeed tied to this appreciation of the material world; and it is not through the objects alone that the materiality of the archive presents itself, but through the physical and labour-intensive processes, systems and spaces that support the objects. I have never known any member of the public who has taken part in a 'behind the scenes' tour of archives not to be completely captivated by the physicality of the strongrooms, with its rows of boxes and shelves of rare books that normally remain beyond their sight and grasp.

Even as academic libraries dispose of books at an alarming rate and the digital provision of information and services of all sorts continues to expand, we find the smell, sound and feel of paper pleasing. Giuliana Bruno presents this inconsistency as a burgeoning topic of scholarly concern:

It is interesting to note that an intense interest in material culture and a deep fascination for the materiality of the archive has emerged in the digital age, characterized by networks and their seeming immateriality. New disciplines, methods, and forms of scholarship have originated from this tension between material and immaterial culture, and they express this very tension in their development.

She links this to media archaeology, which she perceives as a field of study that presents 'deep interest in the material history of things combined with a fascination for systems and networks'. (n.p.) Thus, media archaeology's association with archives in the post-digital era is well defined.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the physical archive is a place of textural as well as textual communication, allowing the consideration of objects outside of the standard information-based archival structure that is centred on content. A very different relationship to information comes out of our handling of archival objects, in terms of their own material diversity as well as that of the envelopes and wrappers that contain them. These objects bombard our senses, especially in terms of smell and touch. The relationship between the content of documents and their material make up is of course a close one: materiality can carry meaning—temporal, historical and environmental—and can communicate information in a different way. Goldsmith's concept of the *duality* of text 'endlessly flipping back and forth between the meaningful and the material' (2011, p. 3) is key to the archive, where physical imperfections such as folds, cockles, creases and tears, work

alongside the content to afford a unique understanding of an object, one that is completely different from reading a transcription (whether printed or on screen), or from viewing a digital image of the object itself. Ramsay identifies information communicated through the computer interface as a filter of 'the ideologies associated with the context of its production'. (pp. 281) Aside from the material aspects of archive objects *per se*, further information in the form of text or other markings on the backs of photographs, the outside of envelopes, or in the margins of letters or books, are often missing in the digitized objects that are presented to readers.

### Immobility is a virtue

The digitized archive, as Ernst points out, 'loses its temporal exclusivity'. He asks: 'With increasing mobility and acceleration, should we rather value the immobile archive for its time-resisting virtue?' And he gives an immediate answer: 'Archival resistance against change is indeed a virtue in the age of networked documents which dissolve into memory buffered streaming data.' (2016, p. 14) Photographs have much to lose through loss of order. As argued vigorously in this book, archive image sets, with original order maintained, do not establish narratives. Photographs are inherently time-specific and de-contextualized objects, short and discrete embodiments of time that rely on their physical position in the archive and their documentation in the archive list for their significance in the world. Archival arrangement is not merely an aid to the establishment of historical narrative, but a way of deconstructing it, as Ernst argues with specific reference to photographs:

As data bank structures, the archival mode of memory (record management) is a non-narrative alternative to historiography [...] An archival collection of photographs as accumulation (different from private photo albums) does not yet constitute a meaningful story; on the contrary, it rather deconstructs narrative. Archival logistics of ordering images undercut the iconological narrative by discrete counting (alphanumeric metadata). (ibid., p. 12)

With large institutions such as the British Library and the Library of Congress releasing millions of public domain images onto the Internet, the arguments around digitization, semantic reordering and de-contextualization may seem irrelevant and somewhat passé; these institutional models illustrate how archive material can be quickly and easily absorbed into mainstream

network culture. This is, in itself, a strong argument for preserving and documenting the ordered systems of the physical archive as a platform that is vital for preserving anomalous spatial relationships, thus facilitating understanding and interpretation of historical documents and artefacts, whether they are available online or not.

Allan Sekula strongly maintains that the photographic image is dependent on its place, arguing, 'it is clear that photographic meaning depends largely on context. [...] photographs, in themselves, are fragmentary and incomplete utterances. Meaning is always directed by layout, captions, text, and site and mode of presentation.' This explains his palpable anxiety over the marginalization of images taken from the Shedden Archive and repositioned for the production of a book (2003, pp. 445-48), as well as Douglas Crimp's disapproval of the art-driven rearrangements that took place in the New York Public Library that 'ghettoized' photographic images and weakened their status as document (p. 7), as detailed in Chapter 1. Today, we may carry out appropriations of images daily as part of our networked lives, and without much, if any, consideration for the long-term ecology—the lifecycle—of the image. It can be caught with one touch of the finger and released into a different environment with another. On one hand, the networked image has become multi-functional with the rise of the stock photos and other less formalized appropriations. However, it has also become *dysfunctional* as it loses contextual integrity and individual value, dipping in and out of different networked usages and unions and suffering multiple de- and re-contextualizations. Appropriation is sometimes considered as, or conflated with, 'curation', another term that, like 'archive' has over the last few years made the leap from institutional to public vocabulary.

The movement of images is clearly and abundantly evident in social media spheres. And, as Michael Moss, succinctly puts it, '[the digitized archive image] becomes feral, like cat let out of doors'. He continues:

For the consumer this liberation creates all sorts of opportunities: it can be enlarged, viewed in different lights and in different contrasts, flattened, cut up, annotated, compared side by side with other objects and, above all, set free on social media for others to play with. All this flies in the face of the sentinels guarding the archive (p. 264).

This excursive use is overwhelmingly transformative for the image in terms of changes in both context and physical appearance. Hito Steyerl, in her essay 'In Defense of the Poor Image' stops for a moment to consider how the image *becomes* and how it *is* poor:

The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends toward abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming. The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image. Its genealogy is dubious. Its file names are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. Only digital technology could produce such a dilapidated image in the first place. (p. 32)

In her robust *defense* of the poor image, Steyerl argues:

Poor images are thus popular images—images that can be made and seen by the many. They express all the contradictions of the contemporary crowd: its opportunism, narcissism, desire for autonomy and creation, its inability to focus or make up its mind, its constant readiness for transgression and simultaneous submission. Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them. (p. 41)

Thus, we are presented with a deep rift between archival security and control and the desire for instant public access to images, where they can do with them whatever they wish.

Steyerl also believes that a new aura surrounds the ‘poor’ image, one that is reliant on the very transience of the copy, rather than the permanence of the original (p. 42). She also argues against the ‘neoliberal radicalization of the concept of culture as commodity’ (p. 36) and I am overwhelmingly in agreement with this stance. I must once again stress that I am in no way going against the tide of openness and free movement of images—and I acknowledge that to label them or identify their genealogy would often weaken their new position. Whilst acknowledging, as I do in Chapter 4, that notions of reproducibility and therefore mobility always already lie at the core of the photographic object, and the media object in more general terms, I would quite simply argue that their original location should be

preserved in some way. Ernst describes how working with digitized archives can indeed result new creative insights, based on chance retrieval, but he strongly argues that that ‘Such operations are possible in computational space without destroying the material and symbolic order of the existing archive.’ (2016, p. 11)

Security systems abound in archives, and these are put in place specifically to prevent the loss, damage or misfiling of archive objects. There is much to negotiate in terms of user registration and proof of identity, and embargos on mobile phones and even pens (pencils are allowed). This can come across as unwelcoming and inconvenient for users and it is perhaps particularly the case with regard to the ‘Google generation’, where information on the internet is quick and easy to access. Such an emphasis on security is perhaps even perceived as a purposeful and unnecessary assertion of archival power. But the archive is a materially controlled information management system and the safekeeping and stasis of the archive is dependent on the maintenance of human procedures and physical structures. Security systems operate as part of the administrative system on the inside—away from the gaze of the user—and apply to archive workers, making the object’s journey from strongroom to searchroom a laborious one. To give one common example, carbon-copied paper slips, recording the manuscript number and its exact shelf location, are left in place of the object, in order to prevent a borrowed document from being misplaced. Only when the carbon copies are brought together can we be sure that the object has been returned to its place in the system; the administrative apparatus of the archive ensures that after use these objects return quickly and safely to their assigned place inside the file, inside the box, inside the strongroom. Through this system, the notions of memory and trace that are associated with archive objects also exist in the material systems that manage them.

Chun highlights the problem of the volatility of digital archives, arguing that provenance and authenticity could be seriously undermined by the falsification or alteration of electronic images and documents (p. 138). Yet, it is almost impossible to completely *destroy* information on the Internet, even our own information. As in the physical archive, measures are taken to prevent loss in networked spaces, although we may be unaware that this is happening. Vismann argues: ‘Auto-protocol features save data from complete de-contextualization and immaterialization, thus retaining the filing principle, even in the digital domain’ (p. 164). But, unlike physical objects held in restricted spaces and under the watch of the archivist, digital objects can be copied, and the copies become new objects with their own histories and trajectories. Content can be altered or rearranged in a way

would be considered unthinkable—and highly unethical—inside the walls of the institution.

## New state archives

We operate in a society where our extensive Internet usage means that we generate information—and archive it—at an overwhelming rate. More critically, we are all subject to state and corporate image capture and archiving on a massive scale. I discuss in Chapter 1 the archivization of photography in police procedures, through the work of Alphonse Bertillon and Francis Galton. John Tagg frames such procedural photography as widespread in its use: ‘From the mid nineteenth century on, photography had its role to play in the workings of the factory, the hospital, the asylum, the reformatory and the school’ (p. 77). He perceives the use and acceptance of photography as evidence as not only being because of ‘the privilege attached to mechanical means in industrial societies’, but also due to ‘its mobilisation within the emerging apparatuses of a new and more penetrating form of the state’. This was, Tagg argues, in order to instil ‘docility and practices of social obedience within the dangerously large urban concentrations which advanced industrialisation necessitated’ (pp. 61–62).

The remit of image-based surveillance techniques remains largely unchanged, although it is not anymore limited to large cities or criminal types, and the techniques are rather different. We are now monitored and ultimately controlled not only through the generally unconcealed imaging systems of traffic and security cameras (which are profuse in archives, incidentally), webcams and facial recognition technologies, but also through covert means. These range from smartphone tracking and satellite imaging to more intimate ground-based systems such as that which emerges in Chapter 1 through Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin’s 2013 project *Spirit is a Bone*, where we see the covert production of three-dimensional data maps of people in public spaces. These ‘non-collaborative portraits’ (as innocuously described by the technicians involved) constitute an advanced form of state surveillance that is rooted in technological innovation.

Ernst suggests that we have more to fear from the power structures of network technologies that leave no paper trail—and at best a limited data trail—than we ever did from old state archives: ‘On the other side of the monitor [...] an authoritative archive of protocols is more rigidly at work than in any traditional national archive.’ (2002, p. 482) Chun further argues that the way that Google databanks store every search entered and link

them to an individual IP address, makes Google ‘the “stasi resource” of the twenty-first century’. (p. 97) In addition to state and corporate systems, surveillance has become a personal matter, with dash cams mounted in car windshields, for example—a practice that is at the time of writing illegal in many US states but widely used in the UK—and home security systems that are often supported by data collecting phone apps.

Within all these image-based surveillance techniques, the issue of spatiotemporal registration, the accurate recording of time and place, is of course critical in terms of producing evidence. It is an aspect of the photographic image that is key to the archive and is unpicked in detail in Chapter 4. The ‘archive’ that emerges through constant surveillance is a continuous narrative—Foucault’s ‘unbroken linearity’ (2002, p. 145)—that is unlike most archive storage, but its examination is just as dependent on techniques of enumeration. Videos from surveillance cameras—including those owned by members of the public and seized by the authorities—can be fast-forwarded and rewound to locate the exact point in time that is pertinent to the investigation. These images are in fact rarely seen and most of us only ever know of them from TV detective shows and news broadcasts. But they remain ‘on file’, at least until storage space runs out. Of course many images in the physical archive also stay out of sight, filed away and often only met through descriptions and lists; but they are ‘seen’ images: the photographer views the scene at the time of capture, the technician at the time of processing and printing, and the archivist at the time of cataloguing. Surveillance images, on the other hand, are the product of non-human capture and can escape human eyes entirely; they are increasingly part a production process not intended for humans at all, to be machine-read and machine-reconfigured as necessary. Whether this excludes them from designation as ‘archive’ is negotiable—and not at all important in terms of their immense power.

## To the future

Whatever scenario these politically, economically and culturally unruly times present for the archive in the future, the topics discussed in this book will endure. What we think of as photographic images may broaden and methods of capture may change as technologies are pushed on, but the fundamental premise of archivization will not, and language of some kind will always be involved. Ludovico argues that the survival of the printed book is due to it being the best interface ever designed (p. 7). This argument also

holds true for the archive interface, with its recorded, regulated, hierarchical and static system of boxes, files and objects, together with the catalogue interface that works in parallel with it and the human industry that manages it. The successful operation of physical archives has been proven by their persistence over time: the story of Gautier of Nemour's archival transcription of Philip II of France's 'royal chapel' in the late twelfth century is recounted in Chapter 3—and even this is recent history in terms of archives and, more generally, recordkeeping.

Archive catalogue descriptions are never considered as dead media here, nor are they seen as inferior objects, and the arguments made for this method of cataloguing are contemporary and forward facing. This book does not present a closed history of antiquated archival techniques, instead it provides an analysis of a form of cultural administration that has significant and lasting consequences, especially for the photographic image. The efficacy of full text description of images as part of the cataloguing process is examined in this book alongside both historical and recent technical developments; image digitization, internet archives, photo-sharing sites, neural networks and tagging systems might all be thought of as technologies that render description redundant. Research into artificial neural networks is indeed developing at a pace, but the extent of machine learning of real-world situations required for practical and economical application is vast. It is not yet ready for everyday use in archives: machines are extremely good at sifting through data and recognizing patterns, but this is not enough in terms of accurately and comprehensively cataloguing images. Therefore, I argue that images are best directly described by humans—and that description itself is a human peculiarity, a strong, embedded cultural technique that will prevail.

If institutional techniques of image description were to fall into fast decline, or even disappear—through advances that allow practical and economical applications of precise and meaningful machine description, or due to financial constraints, which is much more likely—the arguments made here would still stand. This is for two reasons: firstly, even though the techniques may decline, extant descriptions and lists will continue as search tools—and as the way we first encounter many images—and printed catalogues will be available even in times of network failure. Secondly, the approach taken here to the description of the visual content of images is an unbound one. It is projected out of the archive and into different territories as it examines the implications of taking such a methodological—yet linguistically and temporally poetic—approach to the 'writing' of the photographic image. The object-level description allows



a novel 'reading' of the discrete image, and the hierarchical listing system affords a distinctive route to the understanding of image seriality and image time. The spatiotemporal condition of the photograph—analogue, digital or digitized—which is so effectively revealed by the recordkeeping and institutional management techniques of the archive, will stand up under all possible 'archival' storage environments: social and institutional; physical and networked.

## Works cited

- Bergson, H. (1911). *Matter and Memory*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Bruno, G. (2016). Storage Space. *e-flux Architecture*. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/68650/storage-space/> [Accessed 3 August 2018]
- Chun, W.H.K. (2011). *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Crimp, D. (1989). The Museum's Old / the Library's New. In R. Bolton (Ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (pp. 3-14). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Derrida, J. (1974). *Glas*. Paris: Éditions Galilée.
- Derrida, J. (2005). *Paper Machine*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Ernst, W. (2002). Archive in Transition. In B. Von Bismark, H.-P. Feldmann, H.U. Obrist, D. Stoller & U. Wuggenig (Eds.), *Interarchive* (pp. 475-484). Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung.
- Ernst, W. (2013). *Digital Memory and the Archive*. Edited and with an introduction by J. Parikka. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Ernst, W. (2016). Radically De-historicising the Archive. Decolonising Archival Memory from the Supremacy of Historical Discourse. In *Decolonising Archives* (pp. 9-16). L'Internationale Online.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Gat, O. (2014). To Bind and to Liberate: Printing out the Internet. *Rhizome*, 1 May 2014. Available at: <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/may/1/printing-out-internet/> [Accessed 8 December 2018]
- Gitelman, L. (2014). *Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Goldsmith, K. (2011). *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Henning, M. (2018). *Photography: the Unfettered Image*. London: Routledge.
- Ludovico, A. (2012). *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894*. Eindhoven: Onomatopée.

- Manovich, L. & Douglass, J. (2009). Visualizing Temporal Patterns in Visual Media: Computer Graphics as a Research Method [Online]. Available at: [http://softwarestudies.com/cultural\\_analytics/visualizing\\_temporal\\_patterns.pdf](http://softwarestudies.com/cultural_analytics/visualizing_temporal_patterns.pdf) [Accessed 18 September 2018]
- Moss, M. (2018). Memory Institutions and Digital Disruption? In A. Hoskins (Ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (pp. 253-297). New York: Routledge.
- Parikka, J. (2013). Archival Media Theory: an Introduction to Wolfgang Ernst's Media Archaeology. In W. Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (pp. 1-22). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Philipson, A. (2012). Google Offers Secret Glimpse into 'Where the Internet Lives'. *The Telegraph*, 18 October 2012. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/google/9616793/Google-offers-secret-glimpse-into-where-the-internet-lives.html> [Accessed 1 December 2018]
- Ramsay, D. (2018). Tensions in the Interface. In A. Hoskins (Ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (pp. 253-279). New York: Routledge.
- Sekula, A. (2003). Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital. In L. Wells (Ed.), *The Photography Reader* (pp. 443-452). London: Routledge.
- Steyerl, H. (2012). *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Tagg, J. (1988). *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Education Limited.
- van Dijck, J. (2007). *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Vismann, C. (2008). *Files: Law, Media and Technology*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.



# Bibliography

- Alberro, A. (1998). Structure as Content: Dan Graham's *Schema* (March 1966) and the Emergence of Conceptual Art. In G. Moure (Ed.), *Dan Graham* (pp. 21-29). Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona y Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela.
- Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Azoulay, A. (2010). What is a Photograph? What is Photography? *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 9-13.
- Banner, F. (1997). *The Nam*. London: Frith Street Books.
- Banner, F. (2004). *All The World's Fighter Planes 2004*. London: Vanity Press.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Vintage.
- Barthes, R. (1989). *The Reality Effect*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Barrett, G. D. (2013). The Limits of Performing Cage: Ultra-red's SILENT/LISTEN. *Postmodern Culture*, 23/2. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/> [Accessed 26 November 2018]
- Belkhir, L. & Elmeligi, A. (2018). Assessing ICT Global Emissions Footprint: Trends to 2040 & Recommendations. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 177 (2018), 448-463.
- Belknap, R. (2004). *List: the Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Bellour, R. (1990). The Film Stilled. *Camera Obscura*, 24, 99-123.
- Benjamin, W. (1972). A Short History of Photography. *Screen*, 13, 5-26.
- Benjamin, W. (1978). *Reflections*. New York: Schocken.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico.
- Bergson, H. (1911). *Matter and Memory*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Blaschke, E. (2016). *Banking on Images: the Bettmann Archive and Corbis*. Leipzig: Spector Books.
- Boast, R. (2017). *The Machine in the Ghost: Digitality and its Consequences*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Photography: a Middle-Brow Art*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Boym, S. (2008). *Architecture of the Off-Modern*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Briet, S. (1951). *What is Documentation?* (Translated and edited by Ronald E. Day, Laurent Martinet and Hermina G.B. Anghelescu). Paris: Éditions Documentaires.
- Broomberg, A., Chanarin, O. & Weizman, E. (2015). *The Bone Cannot Lie*. Text formed from a conversation between Eyal Weizman and Adam Broomberg &

- Oliver Chanarin. Available at: <http://www.broombergchanarin.com/hometest/#/spirit/> [Accessed 5 April 2018]
- Bruno, G. (2016). *Storage Space. e-flux Architecture*. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/68650/storage-space/> [Accessed 3 August 2018]
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: from Production to Prodisage*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bruns, A. (2008a). The Future is User-Led: the Path towards Widespread Prodisage. *Fibreculture Journal* [Online], 11. Available at: <http://eleven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-066-the-future-is-user-led-the-path-towards-widespread-prodisage/> [Accessed 9 May 2018]
- Burgin, V. (1986). *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Burgin, V. (1997). Art, Common Sense and Photography. In J. Evans (Ed.), *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography* (pp. 75-85). London: Rivers Oram Press.
- Burgin, V. (2004). *The Remembered Film*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Burgin, V. (2011). *Parallel Texts: Interviews and Interventions about Art*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Butler, J. (2003) Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. In A. Jones (Ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (pp. 392-401). London: Routledge.
- Bury, S. (2005). Review of *All the World's Fighter Planes 2004*. *Art Monthly*, June 2005. Available at: <http://www.fionabanner.com/vanitypress/awfp2006/index.htm?i24> [Accessed 6 April 2018]
- Campany, D. (2003). *Art and Photography*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Chun, W.H.K. (2011). *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Connor, S. (2002). *Sleights of Voice: Ventriloquism, Magic and the Harry Price Collection*. Available at: <http://stevenconnor.com/hpc.html> [Accessed 19 July 2018]
- Cook, T. (2001). Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts. *Archival Science*, 1, 3-24.
- Coplans, J. (1965). Concerning 'Various Small Fires': Edward Ruscha Discusses his Perplexing Publications. *Artforum*, February 1965, 24-25.
- Crimp, D. (1989). The Museum's Old / the Library's New. In R. Bolton (Ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (pp. 3-14). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Cubitt, S. (2010). The Latent Image, *Inaugural International Conference on the Image*. [Online]. UCLA. Available at: <http://www.visualfields.co.uk/Cubitt.pdf> [Accessed 18 May 2018]
- Derrida, J. (1974). *Glas*. Paris: Éditions Galilée.

- Derrida, J. (1998). *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (2005). *Paper Machine*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Döblin, A. (2003). *August Sander: Face of Our Time*. Munich: Schirmer Art Books.
- Dowling, S. (2012). From *Hinterland B*. In C. Bergvall, L. Browne, T. Carmody & V. Place (Eds.), *I'll Drown My Book* (pp. 248-253). Los Angeles: Les Figues Press.
- Drucker, J. (2010). Temporal Photography. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 22-28.
- Dworkin, C. & Goldsmith, K. (Eds.). (2011). *Against Expression: an Anthology of Conceptual Writing*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Ellis, J. (1993). *Keeping Archives*. Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: D. W. Thorpe.
- Ernst, W. (2001). Art of the Archive. In C. Weber (Ed.), *Art. Archive: New Works on Historical Holdings* (pp. 93-101). Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.
- Ernst, W. (2002). Archive in Transition. In B. Von Bismark, H.-P. Feldmann, H.U. Obrist, D. Stoller & U. Wuggenig (Eds.), *Interarchive* (pp. 475-484). Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung.
- Ernst, W. (2013). *Digital Memory and the Archive*. Edited and with an introduction by J. Parikka. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Ernst, W. (2015). Between the Archive and the Anarchivable. *Mnemoscape*, 1 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mnemoscape.org/single-post/2014/09/04/Between-the-Archive-and-the-Anarchivable-by-Wolfgang-Ernst> [Accessed 14 September 2018]
- Ernst, W. (2016). Radically De-historicising the Archive. Decolonising Archival Memory from the Supremacy of Historical Discourse. In *Decolonising Archives* (pp. 9-16). L'Internationale Online.
- Ernst, W. & Farocki, H. (2004). Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts. In T. Elsaesser (Ed.), *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines* (pp. 261-286). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Flood, A. (2015). US Poet Defends Reading of Michael Brown Autopsy Report as a Poem. *The Guardian*, March 17, 2015. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/17/michael-brown-autopsy-report-poem-kenneth-goldsmith> [Accessed 22 November 2017]
- Flusser, V. (1999). *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Flusser, V. (2000). *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Flusser, V. (2011). *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foster, H. (2004). An Archival Impulse. *October*, 110, 3-22.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2002a). *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.
- Fowler, D.P. (1991). Narrate and Describe: the Problem of Ekphrasis. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 81, 25-35.

- Fowler, S. (2017). Inappropriate Expectations. In D. Thomas, S. Fowler & V. Johnson. *The Silence of the Archive* (pp. 41-63). London: Facet Publishing.
- Frosh, P. (2019). *The Poetics of Digital Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fuller, M. & Goffey, A. (2012). *Evil Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gagosian Gallery (2014). Press Release for the exhibition *Taryn Simon: Birds of the West Indies*, 7 February 2014. Available at: <https://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/taryn-simon--february-27-2014> [Accessed 4 April 2019]
- Gat, O. (2014). To Bind and to Liberate: Printing out the Internet. *Rhizome*, 1 May 2014. Available at: <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/may/1/printing-out-internet/> [Accessed 8 December 2018]
- Gat, O. (2019). How the JPEG Changed Everything. *Frieze* [Online], 4 February 2019.
- Gaudreault, A. (1990) Film, Narrative, Narration: the Cinema of the Lumière Brothers in T. Elsaesser (Ed.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (pp. 68-75). London: British Film Institute.
- Gitelman, L. (2014). *Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Goldsmith, K. (2000). *Fidget*. Toronto: Coach House Books.
- Goldsmith, K. (2003). *Day*. Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures.
- Goldsmith, K. (2011). *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Goldsmith, K. (2012). Conceptual Writing: A Worldview. *Poetry Foundation*. Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/04/conceptual-writing-a-worldview> [Accessed 17 July 2018]
- Goldsmith, K. (2013). *Seven American Deaths and Disasters*. Brooklyn, NY: Powerhouse Books.
- Goldsmith, K. (2016). *Seine (after Ellsworth Kelly)*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Graham, D. (1969). Poem Schema. *Art-Language: the Journal of Conceptual Art*, 1/1, 14-16.
- Green, T. (2016). The August Sander Project: Beginning a Five-Year Exploration of Sander's 'People of the Twentieth Century'. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Available at: <https://stories.moma.org/the-august-sander-project-beginning-a-five-year-exploration-of-sanders-people-of-the-twentieth-a46e6db1ba44> [Accessed 10 January 2018]
- Gunning, T. (2004). What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs. *NORDICOM Review*, 5, 39-49.
- Halsall, A. (1988). 'La Transition', Description et Ambiguités Narrativo-Discursives dans 'Victoire' de William Faulkner. In J. Bessière (Ed.), *L'Ordre du Descriptif* (n.2). Paris: PU de France.
- Harrison, C. (1991). *Essays on Art & Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

- Henning, M. (2018). *Photography: the Unfettered Image*. London: Routledge.
- Hertz, G. & Parikka, J. (2012). Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method. *Leonardo*, vol. 45, no. 5, 424-430.
- Highmore, B. (2012). Listlessness in the Archive. *M/C Journal*, 15 [Online]. Available at: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/546> [Accessed 26 June 2018]
- Hohmann, P. (2016). Archival Appraisal, Jenkinson, Schellenberg, Archival Bond, Impartiality. *The American Archivist*, Vol. 79, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2016, 14-25.
- Hood, C.C. & Margetts, H.Z. (2007). *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hooke, R. (1780). *Microscopic Observations or Dr Hooke's Wonderful Discoveries by the Microscope*. London: Robert Wilkinson.
- Hudson, G. (2003). The Riddle of the Carte de Visite. *The Ephemera Society*. Available at: <http://www.ephemera-society.org.uk/articles/cartes.html> [Accessed 25 March 2018]
- International Council on Archives (2000). *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*. 2nd ed. Ottawa: International Council on Archives.
- Iversen, M. (2010). Auto-Maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography. In D. Costello M. E. Iversen (Eds.), *Photography after Conceptual Art* (pp. 12-27). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Jäger, J. (2001). Photography: a Means of Surveillance? Judicial Photography, 1850 to 1900. *Crime, History & Societies* [Online], 5. Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/chs/1056> [Accessed 22 March 2018]
- Jenkinson, H. (1937). *A Manual of Archive Administration*. London: P. Lund, Humphries & co., Ltd.
- Jisc Digital Media (2009). *Introduction to Image Metadata*. (Jisc Course Material).
- Keller, C. (Ed.). (2008). *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-190*. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art / Yale University Press.
- Ketelaar, E. (1996). Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual. *Archivaria*, 41, 31-40.
- Kittler, F. A. (1999). *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Kotz, L. (2010). *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Krajewski, M. (2011). *Paper Machines: About Cards and Catalogs, 1548-1929*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Kraus, K. (2013). Picture Criticism: Textual Studies and the Image. In N. Fraistat and J. Flanders (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship* (pp. 236-256). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- La Jetée* (1962). Directed by Chris Marker [Film]. France: Argos Films.



- Langlois, G. (2013). Social Media, or Towards a Political Economy of Psychic Life. In G. Lovink & M. Rasch (Eds.), *Unlike Us Reader: Social Monopolies and their Alternatives* (pp. 50-60). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- LeWitt, S. (1967). Paragraphs on Conceptual Art. *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10, Summer 1967, 79-83.
- LeWitt, S. (1969). Sentences on Conceptual Art. *Art-Language: the Journal of Conceptual Art*, 1/1, 11-13.
- Lippard, L. (2001). *Six Years: The Dematerialization Of the Art Object From 1966-1972: A Cross-Reference Book of Information on some Esthetic Boundaries: Consisting of a Bibliography into which are Inserted a Fragmented Text, Art Works, Documents, Interviews, and Symposia, Arranged Chronologically and Focused on So-Called Conceptual or Information or Idea Art with Mentions of such Vaguely Designated Areas as Minimal, Anti-Form, Systems, Earth, or Process Art, Occurring Now in The Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (With Occasional Political Overtones)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lister, M. (2007). A Sack in the Sand. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 13, 251-274.
- Lukács, G. (1970). Narrate or Describe. In G. Lukács, *Writer and critic and Other Essays* (pp. 110-148). London, Merlin Press.
- Ludovico, A. (2012). *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894*. Eindhoven: Onomatopee.
- Macho, T. (2003). Zeit und Zahl. Kalender und Zeitrechnung als Kulturtechniken. In S. Krämer & H. Bredekamp (Eds.), *Bild—Schrift—Zahl*, (pp. 179-192). München: Wilhelm Fink.
- Mad Men*. Season 1, Episode 13: 'The Wheel'. First aired 18 October 2007. Available at: [https://youtu.be/v\\_B7HiLQuMk](https://youtu.be/v_B7HiLQuMk) [Accessed 30 April 2018]
- Magnani, G. (1990). Ordering Procedures: Photography in Recent German Art. *Arts Magazine*, 64, 78-83.
- Manoff, M. (2004). Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines. *Libraries and the Academy*, 41, 9-25.
- Manovich, L. & Douglass, J. (2009). Visualizing Temporal Patterns in Visual Media: Computer Graphics as a Research Method [Online]. Available at: [http://softwarestudies.com/cultural\\_analytics/visualizing\\_temporal\\_patterns.pdf](http://softwarestudies.com/cultural_analytics/visualizing_temporal_patterns.pdf) [Accessed 18 September 2018]
- Marcus, S., Love, H. & Best, S. (2016). Building a Better Description. *Representations* 135/1, 1-21.
- Marlow, C., Naaman, M., Boyd, D. & Davis, M. (2006). *Hypertext 06: Proceedings of the Seventeenth Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia* [Online]. Odense, Denmark: ACM, New York, NY. Available at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~koutrika/Readings/res/Default/p31marlow.pdf> [Accessed 6 June 2012]

- McCarthy, C. (2006). *The Road*. London: Picador.
- McLuhan, M. (1987). *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. London: Ark Paperbacks.
- Menkman, R. (2011). *The Glitch Moment(um)*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- Messier, P. (2008). *Preserving Your Collection of Film-Based Photographic Negatives*. Conservation OnLine (COOL) Available at: <http://cool.conservation-us.org/byauth/messier/negrmcc.html> [Accessed 12 May 2019]
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2004). *August Sander: People of the Twentieth Century. A Photographic Portrait of Germany*. Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2004/august-sander-people-of-the-twentieth-century--a-photographic-portrait-of-germany> [Accessed 28 March 2018]
- Michaud, P.-A. (2004). *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*. New York: Zone Books.
- Miconi, A. (2013). Under the Skin of the Network: How Concentration Affects Social Practices in Web 2.0 Environments. In G. Lovink & M. Rasch (Eds.), *Unlike Us Reader: Social Monopolies and their Alternatives* (pp. 89-102). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- Moss, M. (2018). Memory Institutions and Digital Disruption? In A. Hoskins (Ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (pp. 253-297). New York: Routledge.
- Müller-Pohle, A. (2011). Fotografie, die Feinden der Privatheit. *European Photography*, 90, Fall/Winter 2011, 3.
- Mulvey, L. (2003). The 'Pensive Spectator' Revisited: Time and its Passing in the Still and Moving Image. In D. Green (Ed.), *Where is the Photograph?* (pp. 113-122). Maidstone and Brighton: Photoforum and Photoworks.
- Mulvey, L. (2006). *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London, Reaktion.
- Nelson, R. S. (2000). The Slide Lecture, or The Work of Art History in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Spring 2000), 414-434.
- Newman, M. (2007). *Jeff Wall: Works and Collected Writings*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa.
- Obrist, H. U. (2010). Introduction. In T. Simon, *Contraband* (pp. 1-6). Göttingen: Steidl.
- Orlow, U. & McLennan, R. (2004). *Re: The Archive, the Image, and the Very Dead Sheep*. London: School of Advanced Study/The National Archives/Double Agents.
- Panofsky, E. (1962). *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Parikka, J. (2012). *What is Media Archaeology?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Parikka, J. (2013). Archival Media Theory: an Introduction to Wolfgang Ernst's Media Archaeology. In W. Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (pp. 1-22). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

- Parikka, J. (2015). *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Parkes, K. (1989). In Memoriam: James Bond. *The Auk*, 106 (4), 718-720.
- Parkinson, J. (1640). *Theatrum botanicum: The Theatre of Plants, or An Herball of a Large Extent*. London: Thomas Cotes.
- Perec, G. (2011). *Things: A Story of the Sixties*. London: Vintage. (First published in 1965 in French under the title *Les Choses*).
- Philipson, A. (2012). Google Offers Secret Glimpse into 'Where the Internet Lives'. *The Telegraph*, 18 October 2012. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/google/9616793/Google-offers-secret-glimpse-into-where-the-internet-lives.html> [Accessed 1 December 2018]
- Ramsay, D. (2018). Tensions in the Interface. In A. Hoskins (Ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (pp. 253-279). New York: Routledge.
- Rancière, J. (2013). *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Robbe-Grillet, A. (1971). *The Immortal One*. London: Calder & Boyars.
- Rubinstein, D. (2010). Encyclopaedia: Tag, Tagging. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 197-200.
- Rubinstein, D. & Sluis, K. (2008). A Life More Photographic. *Photographies*, 1, 9-28.
- Ruscha, A. (1969). *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*. Alhambra, California: Cunningham Press.
- Ryan, M.-L. (2008). Narrative. In D. Herman, M. Jahn & M.-L. Ryan (Eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (pp. 344-348). London: Routledge.
- Sander, A. (2003). *Face of Our Time: Sixty Portraits of Twentieth-Century Germans*. Munich: Schirmer Art Books.
- Sanouillet, M. & Petersen. (Eds.) (1975). *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Saper, C. (2018). Microfilm Lasts Half a Millennium. *The Atlantic* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/07/microfilm-lasts-half-a-millennium/565643/> [Accessed 4 September 2018]
- Schmitt, C. (2016). Interpret or Describe. *Representations* 135(1), 109-112.
- Seikaly, R. (n.d., c. 2013/14). Allan Sekula Against the Grain [Online]. SFC: San Francisco Camerawork. Available: <http://www.sfcamerawork.org/against-the-grain/> [Accessed 3 April 2018]
- Sekula, A. (1982). On the Invention of Photographic Meaning. In V. Burgin (Ed.), *Thinking Photograph* (pp. 84-109). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Sekula, A. (1984). *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks 1973-1983*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.
- Sekula, A. (1986). The Body and the Archive. *October*, 39, 3-64.
- Sekula, A. (2003). Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital. In L. Wells (Ed.), *The Photography Reader* (pp. 443-452). London: Routledge.

- Shanken, E. A. (2003). From Cybernetics to Telematics: the Art, Pedagogy, and Theory of Roy Ascott. In E. A. Shanken (Ed.), *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (pp. 1-95). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Shapiro, G. (2007). The Absent Image: Ekphrasis and the 'Infinite Relation' of Translation. *Journal of Visual Culture* 6(1), 13-24.
- Siegel, E. (2003). Talking Through the 'Fotygraft Album'. In A. Hughes & A. Noble (Eds.), *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative* (pp. 239-253). Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Siebert, B. (2013). Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory. *Theory, Culture and Society* 30(6), 48-65.
- Siebert, B. (2015). *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Simon, T. (2013). *Birds of the West Indies*. Ostildern: Hatje Cantz.
- Simon, T. (2016). *Field Guide to Birds of the West Indies*. Ostildern: Hatje Cantz.
- Skrebowski, L. (2010). Productive Misunderstandings: Interpreting Mel Bochner's Theory of Photography. In D. Costello & M. E. Iversen (Eds.), *Photography after Conceptual Art* (pp. 86-107). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Smith, G. (2008). *Tagging: People-Powered Metadata for the Social Web*. Berkeley, California: New Riders.
- Smith, M. (2013). Theses on the Philosophy of History: the Work of Research in the Age of Digital Searchability and Distributability. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 12 (3), 375-403.
- Spens, M. (2010). Fiona Banner: Harrier and Jaguar, Moving Installation Art Fast Forward. *Studio International* [Online], 07 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/fiona-banner-harrier-and-jaguar-moving-installation-art-fast-forward> [Accessed 5 April 2018]
- Stalnaker, J. (2016). Description and the Nonhuman View of Nature. *Representations*, vol. 135, no. 1 (Summer 2016). Special issue: Description Across Disciplines, 72-88.
- Steyerl, H. (2012). *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Stimson, B. (2010). Photography and Ontology. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 41- 47.
- Streitberger, A. & Van Gelder, H. (2010). Photo-Filmic Images in Contemporary Visual Culture. *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, 48-53.
- Surowiecki, J. (2005). *The Wisdom of Crowds*. London: Abacus.
- Tagg, J. (1988). *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Education Limited.
- Talbot, H.F. (1844) [2010, Ebook 33447]. *The Pencil of Nature*. Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33447> [Accessed 27 March 2018]
- van Dijck, J. (2007). *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

- van House, N. A. (2007). Flickr and Public Image-Sharing: Distant Closeness and Photoexhibition. *CHI '07 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computer Systems (CHI 2007)* [Online]. San Jose, California: University of California. Available at: <http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~vanhouse/VanHouseFlickrDistantCHI07.pdf> [Accessed 16 August 2012]
- Vestberg, N.L. (2013). Ordering, Searching, Finding. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 12, 472-489.
- Vinay, J.-P. & Darbelnet, J. (2000). A Methodology for Translation. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader* (pp. 84-93). New York: Routledge.
- Vinegar, A. (2010). Ed Ruscha, Heidegger and Deadpan Photography. In D. Costello & M. E. Iversen (Eds.), *Photography after Conceptual Art* (pp. 28-49). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Vismann, C. (2008). *Files: Law, Media and Technology*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Wall, J. (1990). My Photographic Production. In J.-P. Joly (Ed.), *Symposium: Die Photographie in Der Zeitgenössen Kunst. Eine Veranstaltung Der Akademie Schloss Solitude* (pp. 6-7). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Cantz.
- Wall, J. (1995). 'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art. In A. Goldsteinn & A. Rorimer (Eds.), *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1995* (pp. 246-247). Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Weidner, T. (n.d.). 35mm Slide Medium. Tate website. Available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/dying-technologies-end-35-mm-slide-transparencies/35-mm-slide-medium> [Accessed 20 April 2018]
- Wershler-Henry, D. S. (2005). *The Iron Whim: a Fragmented History of Typewriting*. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Ltd.
- Wilss, W. (1996). *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behaviour*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Winthrop-Young, G. (2013). Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks. *Theory Culture & Society*, 30(6), 3-19.
- Wollen, P. (2007). Fire and Ice, in D. Company (Ed.), *The Cinematic* (pp. 108-113). London: Whitechapel and Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Young, L.C. (2014). On Lists and Networks: an Archaeology of Form. *Amodern* 2 [Online]. Available at: <http://amodern.net/article/on-lists-and-networks/> [Accessed 19 July 2018]
- Young, L.C. (2017). *List Cultures: Knowledge and Poetics from Mesopotamia to Buzzfeed*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

# Index

- 3D imaging 41, 55–57, 197
- Acconci, Vito 177
- administration
- archival 12, 17, 20, 35–36, 52, 97–98, 118–20, 149, 162, 196
  - cultural 184, 199
  - language of 11–12, 14, 20, 23, 70, 100, 106–07, 156–57, 170–80; *see also*; description; poetics; restricted writing
  - sociopolitical 31, 100–01, 102, 104, 126
- aesthetics
- of description 179
  - of the archive 23, 54, 155, 157–60
  - of the photograph 30, 34–35, 39–40, 47, 69, 81
- affect 11, 29, 34, 38, 159, 170, 195
- Amazon Mechanical Turk 89, 89 n. 14
- anthropology 23, 57, 125, 150, 155
- appraisal, archival 98, 165
- appropriation 173, 175–76, 194
- archaeology 18, 127
- Archive Science *see* Cook, Terry; Jenkinson, Sir Hilary; Schellenberg, T.R.; Van Riemsdijk, Theodoor
- archivization 16, 18, 20, 22, 27–28, 52, 58, 197, 198
- arrangement, archival 93, 94–97, 103, 104, 106, 135–36, 184, 185, 193; *see also* order, developmental; order, original
- Art & Language 156, 167–69
- Atget, Eugene 29–30
- August Sander Archive 32, 33
- aura 29–30, 32, 37, 158, 195
- automation 21, 62, 74–75
- back-up 24, 188
- Banner, Fiona 54–55, 177
- All the World's Fighter Planes 2004*: 54–55
  - Harrier and Jaguar* 55
  - The Nam* 177
- Barthes, Roland 30, 50, 77, 81, 86, 116–17, 127–28
- Basque Children of '37 Archive 115, 115
- Becher, Bernd and Hilla 36
- Bellour, Raymond 141–42
- Benjamin, Walter 29–30, 31, 37, 41–42, 41 n. 6, 46, 81–82, 84, 115–16, 156, 175
- Bertillon, Alphonse 20–21, 27–28, 34–36, 35, 40, 57, 126, 197
- Bochner, Mel 165–66
- Boltanski, Christian 159
- Bond, James 53–54, 53 n. 8
- Boulevard du Temple* *see* Daguerre
- Bourdieu, Pierre 65, 69, 72, 81, 90
- Boym, Svetlana 158, 159–60
- Brecht, George 165, 166, 167
- Briet, Suzanne 149–50
- British Library 145, 173, 193
- Broomberg, Adam and Chanarin, Oliver 21, 55–57, 56, 57 n. 9, 197
- Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840–1900* 41–42
- Bruno, Giuliana 18, 19, 192
- Bruns, Axel 87–88
- Burgin, Victor 38, 112, 116, 118, 134, 144
- cabinet cards 62–63, 76
- Cage, John 167
- camera
- analogue 21, 62, 64, 65, 77, 78–79
  - as archiving tool 20, 22, 27–28, 125–52
  - digital 50, 78–82, 147; *see also* camera phone
  - human relationship to 57, 81–82, 115
  - lens *see* optics
  - shutter 22, 128–29, 130, 133, 139
- camera phone 62, 78–82
- apps 23, 62, 74, 79–80, 81, 83, 84, 159–60, 198
- Cameron, Julia Margaret 38–39, 39 n. 5
- captions 28–31, 48, 65, 81–82, 84, 111, 115, 121, 138, 194
- card catalogue 100
- cartes de visites 38, 62–64, 63, 76
- Cartier-Bresson, Henri 82, 82 n. 11
- catalogue 13–15, 18, 21–24, 48, 93–122
- as a machine for thinking 22, 103–06, 103 n. 3
  - online 100, 110, 118–19, 188
  - paper 11, 100, 110, 118, 121, 188
- cataloguing
- as knowledge formation 14, 93–94, 99–106
  - collaborative 87–89, 87 n. 12; *see also* folksonomy
- categorization 32, 47, 54, 56–57, 67–68, 79, 86, 89, 159, 184–85
- Caygill, Howard 133, 133 n. 4
- CCTV *see* surveillance
- collation 109–10
- collocation 109–10
- communication 16, 29–30, 86–87, 90, 116, 150, 192
- completion *see* speculation
- Comrie, Bernard 138 n. 5
- conceptual art 12, 49, 166–69; *see also* Art & Language; Bochner, Mel; Cage, John; Fluxus; Graham, Dan; Kosuth, Joseph; LeWitt, Sol; Ono, Yoko; Ruscha, Ed

- conceptual writing 12, 23, 156 n. 3; *see also* Acconci, Vito; Dowling, Sarah; Dworkin, Craig; Goldsmith, Kenneth; Morris, Simon
- conservation 16, 23, 93, 145, 146–47, 147 n. 7, 149, 160–61
- context 16, 23, 28, 37, 47–48, 54–55, 65, 70, 85, 103–04, 106, 113–14, 129, 138, 152, 166, 184, 188, 193–94
- Conway Library 103–04, 103 n. 4
- Cook, Terry 46–47, 98
- copy 22, 37–38, 42–43, 109, 145–52, 175, 195
- copyright 83, 184, 190, 195
- Corbis 146
- counting 77, 96, 102, 175; *see also* numbering
- Crimp, Douglas 45–48, 194
- cultural techniques 102, 107, 149–50, 199
- cybernetics 100, 156, 168
- Daguerre 133, 143 n. 6, 147
- Dante's *Divine Comedy* 191 n. 5
- database 86, 100, 148, 187, 190
- Daubenton, Louis-Jean-Marie 43–45, 43 n. 7
- de Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc 43–45, 43 n. 7
- decay *see* degradation
- DeepStore 148, 148 n. 9, 188
- degradation
  - digital 83, 146, 157, 191, 195
  - physical 17, 23, 126, 145–47, 156–61, 192
- depiction 49, 166
- Derrida, Jacques 16, 17–18, 20, 23, 27, 46, 191–92, 191 n. 5
- description
  - and time 128–44
  - examples 1, 44–45, 48, 52, 73, 111–12, 113, 114, 117, 128, 129–30, 131–32, 136–37, 143, 171–72, 178–79
  - in natural sciences 42–45
  - literary 107–09, 126–29, 178–80
  - of images, archival 11–16, 22–24, 30–32, 47–48, 50, 70, 94, 105–107, 110–115, 129–32
  - of visual content 12, 22, 30, 31, 50, 70, 85, 106–07, 108, 109, 111–15, 120, 135, 138, 160, 172, 199
  - poetics of 11–12, 23, 156–57, 170–80, 199–200
- deterioration *see* degradation
- Dewey, Melvil 95, 119
- digital culture 15–17, 18–19, 23–24, 46–47, 48, 61, 62, 78–90, 97, 100, 118–22, 145–48, 183–200
- digitization 22, 24, 110, 144–49
- discontinuity 21, 99
- Disdèri, André-Adolphe-Eugène 38
- disorder 17, 22, 52, 94–99
- Döblin, Alfred 32
- document 19, 46, 64, 28, 145, 148–52
  - in relation to art 21, 28, 45–58
- documentary photography 28–30, 37, 45–46, 49, 114–15, 129
- documentation
  - photographic 15, 31–37, 47, 62, 144
  - written 19, 21, 99, 102–03, 104, 149–50, 163, 170, 193
- Duchamp, Marcel 165–66
- duration 22, 126–31, 133–35, 138–39, 144
- dust 23, 158–60
- Dutch Manual* *see* standards, archival
- Dworkin, Craig 173, 177
- ekphrasis 107–109, 178
- El Rastro* 13, 141, 142, 142–44
- enumeration *see* numbering; *see also* counting
- environment
  - in archival storage 23, 145, 148, 148 n. 8, 160, 190–91
  - planetary 78, 190–91
- Ernst, Wolfgang 16, 17–18, 96–97, 127, 133, 139–40, 146, 155, 184, 185, 186, 193, 196, 197
- eugenics 36; *see also* Galton, Francis
- evidence
  - archive as a site of 31, 98, 147, 186
  - photograph as 29, 31, 35, 45, 47, 113–15, 126, 135, 139, 197–98
- fabulation *see* speculation
- Facebook 81, 83, 86, 87, 90, 185, 190, 190 n. 4
- files 13, 19, 20, 77, 93, 102–03, 105, 106, 118, 185–86, 196, 199
- film *see* moving image
- film, photographic 65–66, 145, 147–48, 160; *see also* negatives
- filters *see* photo filters
- fixing
  - in photographic processes 28
  - of meaning 28–31
- Flickr 85, 88, 90, 145, 172, 187,
- Flusser, Vilém 21, 62, 74–75, 77, 78–79, 81, 84, 85, 157, 160
- Fluxus 156, 165, 166–67, 169
- folksonomy 88
- fonds 20, 20 n. 3, 96, 106, 113
- Foster, Hal 155, 155 n. 1
- Foucault, Michel 18, 19, 21, 46, 97, 99, 106, 108–09, 139, 198
- Fowler, D.P. 22, 23, 107–08, 117, 127, 128–29, 178, 179
- Fox Talbot, Henry 39, 42–43
- freeze frame 134, 140, 141
- freezing
  - of negatives 143, 147, 189
  - of time 20, 126, 134, 140–41, 146
- Frosh, Paul 83, 84, 86, 87
- future
  - of archival techniques 198–200
  - use of archives 16, 20, 22, 31, 47, 58, 97–98, 113, 126, 131, 135, 146–47

- Galaxy Zoo 87 n. 12  
 Galton, Francis 27–28, 34–36, 40, 197  
 Gautier of Nemour 103–04, 199  
 Getty Institute 120, 120 n. 7  
 Ginzburg, Carlo 103 n. 3  
 Gitelman, Lisa 19, 45, 148–49, 152, 188, 192–93  
 Goldsmith, Kenneth 156, 169, 170, 173–78  
   *Day* 173  
   *Fidget* 177  
   *Printing out the Internet* 189, 189–190  
   *Seine (after Ellsworth Kelly)* 116  
   *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* 176, 177  
   *The Body of Michael Brown* 176–77  
 Google 79–80, 196, 197–98  
 Graham, Dan  
   *Homes for America* 49  
   *Schema* 167–68, 170  
 greyness 12, 13, 23, 108, 137–38, 162, 170–72, 178  
  
 Hampshire Roads Survey 163–65, 164, 180  
 Harry Price Archive 15, 22, 50–52, 51, 73, 73 n. 4, 77, 136–38, 139  
 hashtag 83, 90; *see also* keyword; tag  
 Henning, Michelle 38, 81–82, 187  
 herballs 42  
 hierarchies, archival 14, 18, 20, 94–95, 94 n. 1, 104–05, 106, 121, 135–36, 185, 199  
 Hine, Lewis 46, 47–48, 70, 129  
 Hitchcock, Alfred 75–78, 75 n. 6  
 Hooke, Robert 42–45, 44  
 human  
   and system hybridity 110, 156, 162  
   hand 38–40, 150, 168, 173–75  
   labour 13–14, 15, 93, 129, 162, 175, 189, 192  
 hypertext 191  
  
 iconology *see* Panofsky, Erwin  
 illustrations 42–45, 44  
 image  
   proliferation 78–81, 125–26  
   recognition software 55–57, 88–89, 197  
   sets 14, 15–16, 21, 45–46, 61, 73  
   time 22, 65, 118, 125–144  
 ImageNet 89  
 Imperial War Museum 109  
 index, indexing 19–20, 33, 50, 54, 77, 82, 102, 116, 126, 142, 169  
 indexicality 28, 49–50, 52, 100, 128  
 inscription 22, 142, 158; *see also* registration  
 Instagram 80–81, 90  
 Institute of Conservation 147, 147 n. 7  
 instruction 12, 13, 23, 107, 156, 162–69  
 interfaces 185, 191, 193, 198–99  
 International Council on Archives 94, 94 n. 1, 95, 105, 106, 110, 120, 135–36  
 interoperability 22, 86, 100, 120–22, 188  
  
 interpretation 17, 32, 64, 85–86  
 interrelatedness 98, 191; *see also* part-to-whole relationships  
 iPhone *see* camera phone  
 Island 13, 85, 171, 172, 172  
 Iversen, Margaret 23, 162–63, 165–66, 168  
  
 Jenkinson, Sir Hilary 98, 99  
 Jisc 119–120, 119 n. 5, 119 n. 6  
  
 Keep, The 104, 190–91  
 Kerouac, Jack 173, 175, 176  
 keyword 83; *see also* hashtag; tag;  
 Kittler, Friedrich 72, 140, 174  
 knowledge  
   production, cataloguing as 14, 93–94, 99–106  
   shared systems of 22, 107, 116–17, 118, 133  
 Kodak 63, 74 n. 5, 160  
   Brownie 61–62  
   Carousel projector 74–75, 75, 76, 77, 77 n. 7, 78  
   Cavalcade projector 74  
   microfilm 148  
   Recordak 147  
 Kosuth, Joseph 168  
 Kraus, Kari 109–10, 112–13, 117, 170  
  
 labour  
   digital labour systems 88–89  
   human 13–14, 15, 93, 129, 162, 175, 189, 192  
 La Jetée 22, 144  
 LaserDisc 76  
 Las Meninas 108–09  
 Leica 81, 82  
 Lerski, Helmar 57  
 letters (correspondence) 90, 96, 106, 145, 150, 193  
 LeWitt, Sol 168–69, 168 n. 9  
 Library of Congress 88, 119, 193  
 listing, archival 14, 99, 100, 102–03, 200  
 lists 21, 22, 52, 94, 99–105, 121, 136–38, 140, 166, 168, 170, 177–78  
 London School of Economics 12 n. 1  
 Ludovico, Alessandro 23, 188, 189, 191, 198  
  
 machine  
   description 89, 199  
   learning 89  
   vision 58, 198  
 Macho, Thomas 102  
 Mad Men 74  
 magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) 41  
 manipulation, photographic 50–52, 126, 134;  
   *see also* photo filters; camera phone apps  
 Marker, Chris *see* La Jetée  
 materiality 12, 13, 17–19, 28, 93, 100, 105, 107, 117, 131, 145, 157–60, 169, 173, 175, 184, 186, 191–93, 196



- McLennan, Ruth 12, 12 n. 1
- media archaeology 16, 18–19, 40–41, 96–97, 100, 155–56, 157–58, 183–84, 192
- memory 17–18, 23, 46, 64, 74, 90, 97, 112, 132, 147, 155, 158–59, 160, 184  
and metaphor 186–88  
computational 187–88  
institutional 186–87
- metadata 84, 87, 119–120, 119 n. 6, 125, 145, 187, 193; *see also* hashtag; keyword; tag  
schemas 83, 86, 119–22
- metaphor 17–18, 19, 23, 28, 48, 80, 126, 134, 169, 179, 184–88, 190
- microfilm 147–48, 188
- Micrographia* *see* Hooke, Robert
- microscope *see* optics
- MoMA, New York 46, 49
- Morris, Simon 156, 175–76
- Mountbatten Archives 15, 15 n. 2, 64–65, 66, 67, 111–13, 131–32, 138–39
- moving image 22, 30, 53–54, 72–73, 75–76, 112, 118, 134–44, 177, 179
- Mulvey, Laura 22, 142–43, 152
- Muybridge, Edward 138–39, 140
- narrative 14, 18, 21, 22, 31, 54, 62–64, 70, 72, 76, 90, 96–97, 102, 107–08, 112, 117, 126–44, 178, 186, 193, 198  
and description 127, 136–39  
and story 64  
pause 108, 126–39
- National Archives (UK) 98, 100 n. 2, 148
- National Galleries Scotland 34
- negatives 32, 145, 147–48, 152, 189; *see also* film, photographic
- Nelson, Robert S. 76–77
- network culture *see* digital culture
- neural networks 89, 199
- neutrality 18, 30–31, 47, 69, 70, 113, 128, 164–65
- New York Public Library 45–46, 48, 194
- Niépce, Nicéphore 42
- no filter 159 n. 4
- nostalgia 74, 158–160, 185
- Nouveau Roman 108, 178–79 *see also* Péric, Georges; Robbe-Grillet, Alain
- numbering 14, 21, 31, 65–66, 73, 77, 78, 97–102, 136, 140, 184, 185, 198; *see also* counting
- Ono, Yoko 167, 172
- On the Road* *see* Kerouac, Jack; Morris, Simon
- optics 27, 40–45, 131  
camera lens 34, 42, 49, 131, 133, 142  
microscope 42, 43, 44
- oral practices 15, 62–64, 68, 71, 76
- order  
chronological 65–67, 72–73, 86–87, 97, 99, 136, 139, 144, 186  
diachronic, developmental 18, 22, 66–68, 96, 103, 134, 136, 138, 186  
of objects as described 111–12  
original 18, 21, 22, 47, 52, 61, 65–66, 67–68, 73, 94–99, 136–37, 140, 152, 187, 193–94; *see also* respect des fonds
- Orlow, Uriel 12–13
- Oulipo 156, 156 n. 2, 178
- painting 21, 34, 37–38, 39, 108–09, 116, 117, 133–34, 169
- Panofsky, Erwin 22, 116–17, 118, 133
- paper 100, 145, 151, 157, 158, 159, 191–93
- Parikka, Jussi 19, 21, 23, 40–41, 80, 147, 157, 158, 160, 174, 185
- Paris Police Archives 20, 27, 34–36, 40, 126
- Parkinson, John 42
- part-to-whole relationships 28, 28 n. 1, 37, 106, 129
- Patel, Hetain 101–02, 101
- Patrons-watch-an-activist-004.jpg* 13, 14, 129–31, 129 n. 3, 138
- PD5454 148, 148 n. 8
- Pencil of Nature* *see* Fox Talbot, Henry
- People of the Twentieth Century* *see* Sander, August
- Péric, Georges 178–79
- performativity 12, 13, 16, 23, 52, 102–03, 162–69; *see also* Iversen, Margaret
- photo album 21, 61, 62–65, 66, 67
- photo filters 160; *see also* camera phone apps
- physiognomy 20, 36, 57; *see also* Sander, August; Broomberg, Adam and Chanarin, Oliver
- plot 71, 75, 127, 136
- poetics 11–12, 20, 23, 40, 156–57, 166–80, 199–200; *see also* language and poetics of administration; description, poetics of
- Portable Document Format (PDF) 100, 188
- portrait photography 21, 29, 31–36, 33, 35, 37, 46, 55–57, 56, 61, 62–64, 111, 197
- post-digital 18, 23, 183–98
- postmodernism 17–18, 37, 40, 46, 48
- power  
archival 16, 17, 57, 97, 100–01, 104, 197  
state 100, 102, 126, 187–98
- PowerPoint 77
- printing technologies 42–43
- privacy 23, 83, 184
- produsage *see* Bruns, Axel
- Psycho* *see* Hitchcock, Alfred
- Pussy Riot 56
- radicality 23, 41, 108, 143, 157, 169, 187–79, 195
- reading the image 22, 106, 115–18, 199–200
- ready-made 12, 165
- recordkeeping 12, 13, 16, 22, 46, 98, 99, 106, 156, 167, 170, 173, 175, 187, 199, 200
- refrigeration *see* freezing of negatives
- registration, moment of 22, 126, 139, 143, 152, 198; *see also* inscription

- repetition 23, 71, 74, 108, 162, 168, 170, 179  
 representation 11, 20, 49–50, 58  
 reproduction *see* copy  
 respect des fonds 20 n. 3, 96  
 researcher 13, 16, 17, 31, 46–47, 71, 93, 99, 103, 106, 113, 121, 145, 150, 160, 175  
 restricted writing 11, 12, 14, 116, 117, 129 *see also* Oulipo  
 retrieval *see* search and retrieval  
 rhythm 23, 170, 172  
 Robbe-Grillet, Alain 178, 179  
 Royal Anthropological Institute 111  
 Rubinstein, Daniel 80, 82, 84, 85, 86–87, 88, 89  
 Ruscha, Ed 23, 162, 163, 164–65  
     *Three Standard Envelopes* 165  
     *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* 163  
 Samutsevic, Yekaterina 56  
 Sander, August 20, 28–29, 31, 40  
     August Sander Archive 32, 33  
     August Sander Project, MoMA 49  
     *People of the Twentieth Century* 20–21, 28, 31–36, 36 n. 4, 33, 55–57, 99  
     keyword and machine-based 16, 85, 100, 119, 121–22, 197–98  
 Schellenberg, T.R. 98  
 scientific imaging 20, 27–28, 32–33, 40–45, 125  
 scores, event and musical 165, 166–67, 169, 179  
 search and retrieval 23, 100, 103, 184, 188, 199  
 security  
     archival 23, 188, 195, 196–97  
     cameras *see* surveillance  
 Sekula, Allan 17, 20, 27–28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 36–37, 39–40, 47–48, 57, 66–67, 129  
     *Mediations on a Triptych* 37, 68–71, 68 n. 1, 128, 131–32, 194  
 senses 72, 147, 192  
 SEPIADES *see* metadata schemas  
 sequences, photographic 22, 37, 40, 64, 74, 84, 112, 135, 140, 144  
 seriality 27, 61, 71, 99, 106, 200  
 Siegel, Elizabeth 62–64  
 Siegert, Bernhard 102, 107, 150  
 signification 30, 36, 38, 86, 104, 107, 116–17, 117, 121, 128, 134, 139, 160, 178–79  
 Simon, Taryn  
     *Birds of the West Indies* 52–54  
     *Contraband* 52  
 slide  
     glass lantern 73  
     lecture 76–77  
     slideshow 21, 71–73  
     projectors *see* Kodak  
 Skrebowski, Luke 165–66  
 Sluis, Katrina 80, 82, 84, 89  
 smartphone *see* camera phone  
 snapshot 21, 37, 61–62, 63, 64–67, 66, 67, 68–71, 72, 78–79, 114–15, 130, 132, 133  
 social media 21, 23, 58, 61, 62, 79–81, 81 n. 10, 86–87, 122, 159, 194; *see also* Facebook; Flickr; Instagram  
 speculation 30, 68, 113, 118, 132, 135  
*Spirit is a Bone* *see* Broomberg, Adam and Chanarin, Oliver  
 spirit photography 15, 22, 50–52, 57  
 Stalnaker, Joanne 43  
 standardisation 16, 30, 34–35, 99, 118–19  
 standards, archival  
     *Dutch Manual* 97, 107, 110, 113  
     *General International Standard Archival Description* 28 n. 1, 94 n. 1, 110  
     *Manual of Archive Administration* 98  
 stasis, archival 19, 20, 28, 64, 131, 136, 145, 146, 184, 186, 193–197, 196  
 Steyerl, Hito 83, 84, 194–95  
 Stieglitz, Alfred 40, 47–48, 70, 129  
 storage  
     network 47, 48, 78, 80, 82, 85, 97, 157, 183, 184–86, 187, 188, 190, 200  
     physical 13, 14, 19, 23, 93–94, 96, 103, 104–05, 126, 135, 145, 147, 148, 148 n. 8, 157, 160, 162, 184, 186, 189, 191, 198, 200  
 straight8ers 73, 73 n. 3  
 subtitles 142, 195  
 surveillance 21, 22, 53, 56–58, 126, 135, 197–98  
 Swartz, Aaron 190, 190 n. 3  
 Szarkowski, John 46  
 tag 15, 21, 61, 82–88; *see also* hashtag; keyword  
 Tagg, John 126, 197  
 tapestry 135, 140  
 taxonomy 54, 88  
 temporality 14, 18, 20, 22, 64, 73, 74, 77, 96, 99, 103, 126, 129, 131, 132–44, 152, 157, 160, 166, 186, 192, 193, 199; *see also* duration; time  
 tense (grammatical)  
     and aspect *see* Wollen, Peter  
     in description 137–38, 178–79  
 thesaurus terms 89, 119–20, 121–22  
 time 18, 19–20, 23, 74, 90, 96–97, 105, 157–59, 170, 198  
     of describing 14, 30–31, 109, 121  
     of the image 22, 28, 31, 65, 68, 118, 126–145, 193, 200  
     preservation of 20, 22, 68, 126, 130, 131, 145, 158, 170  
     *see also* duration; temporality  
 transcription 13, 104, 106, 156, 173, 175–76, 193, 199  
 translation 102, 107, 116, 150, 156  
 typewriter 76, 174–75  
 typologies 28, 32, 35–36, 96  
 Ubuweb 156 n. 3, 163 n. 5, 190, 190 n. 2  
 units of description 18, 93, 105, 106, 136

- van Dijk, José 158, 159, 160, 186  
 van Riemsdijk, Theodoor 97, 98  
 Velasquez, Diego *see Las Meninas*  
 vernacular image *see* snapshot  
 Vestberg, Nina Lager 22, 103–04  
 Victoria and Albert Museum 39, n. 5  
 vinegaring 148, 160  
 Vismann, Cornelia 19, 102, 103–04, 105, 175, 185, 196  
 Visual Resources Association 120  
 vocabularies 83, 86, 89, 110, 116, 118–22, 120 n. 7; *see also* thesaurus terms
- Wall, Jeff 49, 52, 114–15  
*A Partial Account (of events taking place between the hours of 9.35 a.m. and 3.22: a.m., Tuesday, 21 January 1997):* 135–36, 140, 143, 166
- Boxing* 115, 132–33  
*Milk* 132–33  
*Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* 114  
 Warburg Library 103, 103 n. 3, 103 n. 4, 104  
 Watt, James 151, 151  
*We Are All Photographers Now!* 80, 80 n. 9  
 Weston, Edward 40  
 wheels 74–75, 77  
 Wikipedia 88  
 Wollen, Peter 134–35, 138–39, 138 n. 5, 139, 144  
 work *see* labour, human  
 writing the image 106–115
- Young, La Monte 166, 167  
 Young, Liam Cole 22, 99, 100, 101, 102, 170